

Palo Alto California

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

October 19–24, 2025



COVER: The Palo Alto Transit Center in Palo Alto, California. (ULI)

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Palo Alto California

A Vision for the Future of the Palo Alto Transit Center

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

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About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. Each year, thousands of events, both virtual and in person, are held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on [X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

About ULI San Francisco

ULI San Francisco brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and communities across the region for educational programs, initiatives, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. With over 2,100 members, ULI San Francisco furthers ULI's mission by locally delivering on the Institute's best practices in leadership development and by

facilitating regional community service and enhancement of land use policy and practice. ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, impartially reports findings, and convenes forums to find solutions.

About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAM

is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda of an Advisory Services panel is tailored to meet a sponsor's needs. ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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ULI PANEL

Acknowledgments

This panel is a result of the City of Palo Alto, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), and Stanford University coming together to chart the future for the Palo Alto Transit Center, with the VTA's Palo Alto University Avenue Mobility Hub Ad Hoc Committee serving as the champion of the panel.

The Advisory Services program acknowledges, with gratitude, the leadership and staff of the three organizations for their excellent work framing the study, developing and assembling critical resource materials, and organizing stakeholder interviews.

ULI extends a special thanks to key staff members of these organizations, including Chantal Cotton Gains (deputy city manager), Ria Lo (chief transportation official), Sylvia Star-Lack (transportation manager), Ozzy Arce (senior transportation planner), and Ingrid Velasquez (city manager's office administrative assistant) with the City of Palo Alto; Jason Kim (transit capital planning manager) and Aiko Cuenco (transportation planner) with VTA; and Kelly Kline (associate vice president, government affairs), Lesley Lowe (executive director, Stanford Transportation), and Shweta Bhatnagar (senior director, government affairs) with Stanford University, for their time and dedication up to and throughout the week. Finally, ULI would like to thank the more than 60 stakeholders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel.

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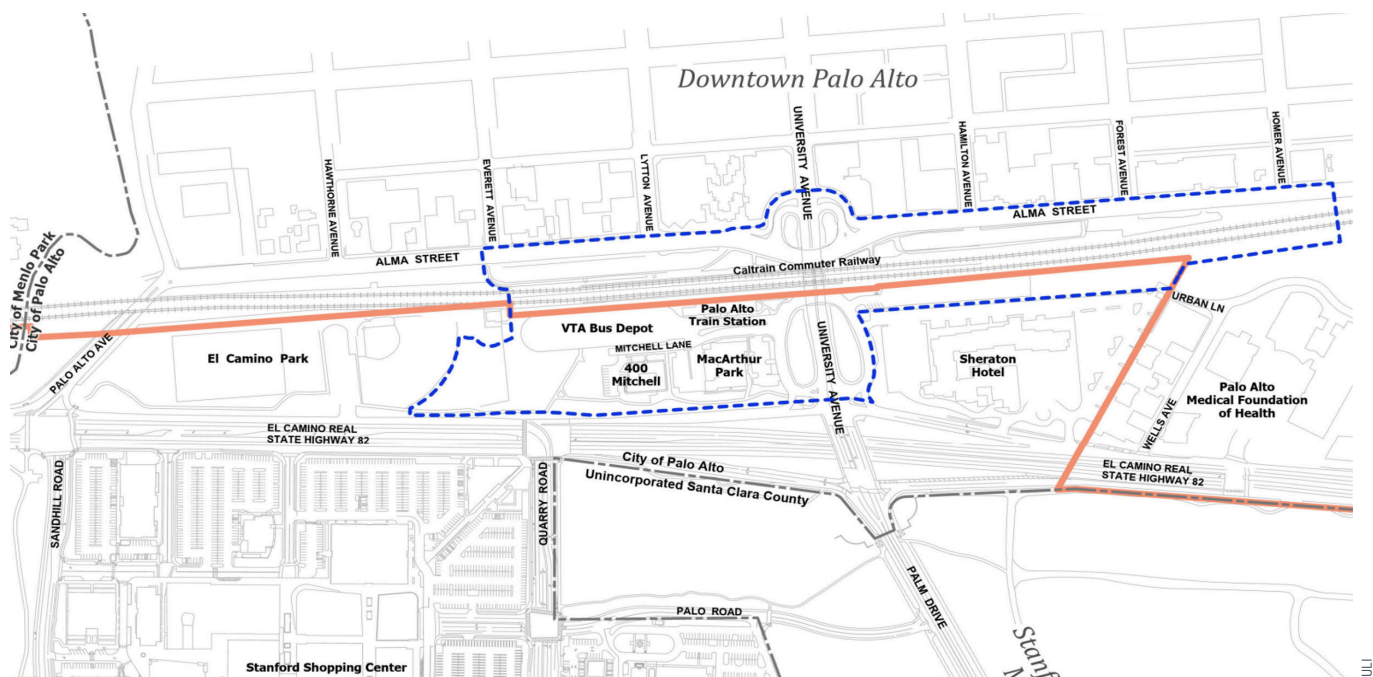
Introduction and Key Recommendations

LOCATED IN PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA, and one of the busiest transit centers in the Bay Area in terms of average daily boardings, the Palo Alto Transit Center serves transit riders locally and across the region. The transit center is located adjacent to downtown Palo Alto and about a mile from Stanford University's central campus.

In 2024, VTA Board initiated a Palo Alto Transit Center University Avenue Mobility Hub Ad Hoc Committee of the VTA Board to discuss the present-day operations and future of the transit center. The efforts of the ad hoc committee renewed interest in the potential for improvements at the Palo Alto Transit Center (the PATC or the transit center). The City of Palo Alto, VTA, and Stanford University (together the sponsors), championed by the ad hoc committee, asked ULI to convene an Advisory Services panel to explore how the sponsors can leverage the station redesign work completed to date and better plan the future of the transit center and transit connectivity, while also leveraging opportunities for development in the parcels that surround the transit center.

A Brief History

The PATC was initially established in the 1860s as a modest shed station serving rail connections between San Francisco and San José. Predating the City of Palo Alto's 1894 incorporation, the station land included in the ULI study area and owned by Stanford University evolved alongside the founding of Stanford University, which influenced the architectural style of the original station. As the Palo Alto commercial district grew, the area around the station became a civic and transportation focal point and soon featured the MacArthur Park building, now a historic landmark. The addition of parkland, also leased from Stanford University, and



The boundary for the study area, marked by a dashed blue line, surrounds the Palo Alto Transit Center.

increasing vehicular infrastructure of the early 20th century further strengthened this community hub function.

By the 1940s, the station was rebuilt in the Streamline Moderne style to accommodate a growing regional travel trend. At that time, daily train service included over 60 boardings, and a new underpass was built under the rail line to accommodate additional automobile traffic moving through the area. Additional car-centric development soon followed and included shopping centers and hotels on land nearby. The 1980s and 1990s saw the transformation of the station into a multimodal transit center with bus bays, parking spaces for personal vehicles, bike facilities, and shuttle connections to Stanford University.

Over the years, these incremental changes to the transit center reflected distinct eras of planning and investment, each responding to evolving transportation needs and urban growth at the time. This incremental planning approach and siloed transit interests have resulted in a transit center that, while meeting the needs of an impressive number of riders, does not function efficiently for the wide community of users it serves. Over time, the evolution of private vehicles and street circulation and a lack of bicycle and pedestrian connections in this area have added to station inefficiencies. This disjointed approach to managing the growth of the transit

center has also left opportunities for additional growth and community benefit unrealized.

Since the late 1990s, Stanford University, the City of Palo Alto (the City), VTA, and other regional agencies have collaborated on multiple planning efforts to transform the PATC into a multimodal gateway. Notable studies include the 2001 “Dream Team” design initiative, the City’s 2007 Implementation Plan, and more recent efforts such as the Quarry Road Transit Connection project, all of which are aimed at improving circulation, access, and land use integration. More recently, as part of Palo Alto’s recent 2023–2031 Housing Element update, Stanford University discussed the possibility of adding housing to the land area adjacent to the station building. These studies consistently emphasize the need to enhance transit efficiency, improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and explore mixed-use and housing opportunities on Stanford-owned land adjacent to the station.

Located on land owned by Stanford University (the University), today the transit center serves as a mobility hub in downtown Palo Alto. The facility has the second-highest Caltrain ridership in the corridor, and the location serves as a regional hub for San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans), the Santa Clara VTA, and Alameda-Contra Costa Transit (AC Transit), which operates the Dumbarton Express, complementing Caltrain

service and connecting Palo Alto to adjacent counties in the south and East Bay. Additionally, Stanford's Marguerite shuttle service and other private shuttles provide last-mile connections from the PATC to the University's central campus and related offices. Each entity shares the use of the transit center. The PATC is a gateway, not only for Palo Alto and Stanford University, but also for the region.

The Panel's Assignment

The sponsors who commissioned this ULI Advisory Services panel recognize the potential of the transit center to serve as a functional gateway for the City, Stanford University, and the regional transit network. ULI was asked to convene a panel to focus on physical improvements for the transit center to improve access and efficiency, as well as to identify what uses might be developed at and immediately surrounding the transit center to increase activity and better serve the Palo Alto and University communities.

The panel was asked to address the following questions from the sponsors:

1. What existing or future uses, onsite features, or amenities would make the Palo Alto Transit Center a more inviting gateway for both downtown Palo Alto and Stanford, and draw in new transit users?
2. What could be done to make the transit center more accessible to a variety of nonvehicular commuters and increase capacity throughput?
3. What are successful models of mixed-use transit centers of similar context (suburban, close to downtown, gateway location, etc.), how were the improvements funded, and what are some of the key ingredients to that success?
4. What mix of uses would be the most feasible? How does density play into this equation?
5. What are phasing and financing options that should be considered for the different aspects of the station's revitalization? What steps can we take in the short, medium, and long term to advance the vision?

There are several important aspects of the transit center that are operating well.

- **Excellent electric intercity rail transit.** Transit riders using the rail service enjoy excellent intercity electrified

rail service, and this station has the second-highest ridership in the Caltrain system. This station is also known for its significant Caltrain GoPass use largely driven by Stanford University and Stanford Medicine, and more recently, BayPass use, which allows free rides on Caltrain and all 27 Bay Area transit agencies.

- **Reliable local and regional bus service.** The buses serving the PATC provide good connectivity to local and regional riders. The Stanford University Marguerite shuttle service provides free and frequent service to and from the PATC and other key destinations.
- **Longstanding institutional partnerships.** The City of Palo Alto, Stanford University, and multiple transit agencies enjoy good, longstanding partnerships that can and should be leveraged further in pursuit of improvements at and around the transit center.
- **Adjacent development potential, particularly for housing.** There is land around the station that could be leveraged for new residential development, particularly the type of transit-oriented, higher density housing envisioned by California [Senate Bill \(SB 79\)](#), the Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act, which was recently passed into State law, taking effect July 1, 2026.
- **Local culture that supports nonvehicular movement.** There is a local culture in Palo Alto that is built upon a high share of daily trips made by bike and walking rather than driving. This culture also supports the use of public transit as a primary means of movement, potentially driving more users to the PATC.

Key Recommendations

Following its review of briefing material provided by the sponsors, a walking tour of the transit center and the surrounding area, and interviews with approximately 60 community stakeholders, the panel provided the following recommendations for the sponsors' consideration.

Land Use Recommendations

Update zoning. The future land use within the study area should be updated to align with envisioned land uses within the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The panel recommends adding a unified Transit Mixed-Use (TMU) category that can assist the City in creating an effective and compliant transit-

oriented development (TOD) and housing policy that responds to market realities. These zoning updates should also entail amending the City's current 2023–2031 Housing Element to include the study area and creating a new Gateway District zoning overlay to guide TOD development at and around the transit center by right.

Update development standards. With a focus on encouraging density and activity in the station surroundings, the City is encouraged to include the following core standards in its new overlay district.

- Broaden permitted land uses to include transit centers, university facilities, multifamily housing, and mixed-use developments.
- Increase building heights to a minimum of three and an average of five stories, and increase densities to 150–300 dwelling units per acre.
- Encourage infill development that adds density.
- Include zero-lot-line options and small setbacks to increase density.
- Require a minimum of 10 percent public space in developments.
- Strive for street and transportation connectivity in all infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage the use of existing parking garages in the surrounding area and eliminate parking minimums for new developments near the transit center.

Seek additional area activation. The transit center and surrounding developments should contribute to the positive experience of moving around or through the area, and prioritizing transit access will ensure that commuters can access the station efficiently. New building designs should support human-scale activity and transit mobility. Segmenting the transit center into distinct use areas can also spur activation and help ensure that users find what they need easily, including bike and scooter rentals and other first- and last-mile mobility support.

Design and Mobility Recommendations

Prioritize clean and safe improvements at the transit center. Lighting improvements and enhanced maintenance at the station and in the surrounding environment are needed to assist with personal safety and encourage additional

ridership. Safety improvements recommended by the panel should also include updating sidewalks and ensuring that any recommendations meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Tackle early transit improvements. The panel identified a host of early improvements that can be made to the transit center in the near term that will help maintain momentum over time and improve the transit experience. These include improving wayfinding at and around the transit center, improving bicycle facilities, adding scooter or bike rentals, and incentivizing nearby garage parking over on-street options.

Improve and expand the busway. With capacity for only 10 buses, additional buses must layover in the surrounding streets. The panel recommends expanding the busway to address this condition. In the longer term, by moving the MacArthur Park restaurant, redesigning the busway, and shifting the entrance and exit to a newly connected Quarry Road, the busway can expand to accommodate up to 16 buses and create better-defined and safer pedestrian walkways.

Reconfigure the roadways and ramps around University Avenue. Also on the longer-term horizon, the panel recommends removing the ramps at Alma Street to create an enhanced street grid and make the pedestrian and bicycle environment safer. They also recommend reducing University Avenue to two lanes (one lane each direction) to create protected bike lanes (also known as Class IV Separated Bikeways) and shifting from angled to parallel parking through downtown to accomplish the same.

Funding and Financing Recommendations

The transit center and TOD improvements envisioned by the panel will require additional funding. In addition to resources offered by the State of California and its agencies, particularly those supporting affordable housing development and others seeking to offset additional transportation infrastructure costs, there are also federal resources that can support additional development around transit. The panel listed a number of grant programs and project funds the sponsors should explore further.

Governance and Implementation Recommendations

The opportunity to transform the PATC and support additional, denser housing and mixed-use development around the transit center will require the ongoing partnership of the City of Palo Alto, Stanford University, and VTA. Additionally, Caltrain and

Santa Clara County should be invited into the partnership as adjacent parcels are within its jurisdiction.

Address governance early. A governance structure under the auspices of a formal agreement, which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the above key partners, will be important, and the panel believes they should be addressed early in 2026.

Address zoning early. The zoning modifications and overlay district must be in place before TOD can be developed in the area. The panel recommends that these updates occur in early 2026.

Begin funding pursuits. Identifying and securing the funding needed to transform the PATC will take time. The sponsors should start exploring all options now so that they will be ready to act when the opportunities arise.

The alignment of key partners and landowners around the PATC positions the center for a bright future ahead. The partners' agreement on a vision for the station that encourages denser, transit-oriented, mixed-use development also positions the land parcels around the center as prime locations for the type of housing that Palo Alto and the broader region need. The goal is to deliver housing that is affordable to residents and supported by a rich transportation network that allows residents and riders to leave personal vehicles behind, thereby reducing household expenses while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This potential PATC transformation presents an exciting opportunity for the City, the University, and the region, and the improvements recommended by the panel can help ensure that the center continues to serve the community well into its next 150 years of service.

Advisory Services Panel Process

The ULI Advisory Services panel meets over five days. Using a process honed over 75 years, an Advisory Services panel has three key parts: listening and learning, panel deliberation, and presentation of expert recommendations. The listening and learning portion of this panel included a full day of on-the-ground experiences: a briefing by the sponsor team, a site tour, and a meet-and-greet event in which the panel heard from residents and other stakeholders to learn their perspectives on the topic. The panel then conducted small-group interviews with stakeholders representing a broad cross-section of interests and perspectives. Using information gathered during these activities and briefing materials provided by the sponsor team, the Advisory Services panel team spent two days developing and drafting recommendations and producing a presentation. This presentation was made on the last day of the Advisory Services panel. Although time was limited, the panelists made every effort to incorporate what they learned and what they heard. The recommendations in this report reflect this effort and what the panel knew at the time. Next steps, including the implementation of the recommendations included within this report, rest with the sponsor team and key stakeholder groups. The panel acknowledges that further evaluation of these recommendations for feasibility and applicability over time may be necessary.



CANVA AI

In the Future

THE PANEL CREATED AND SHARED THE FOLLOWING STORY to illustrate a potential futurescape for the Palo Alto Transit Center. In their vision, transportation and services at the transit center naturally transition into downtown Palo Alto and the Stanford University campus while actively supporting ridership and economic vitality in the immediate area.

It is a warm and sunny late afternoon in August, and Kayla and her parents were arriving at the Palo Alto Transit Center on Caltrain from San Francisco, a part of their long trip from Illinois. They did not have to wait long for their train, with high-speed service running every 10 minutes. Before they knew it, the doors of the train opened at the sleek, art deco-style station.

The platform streamed with people exiting and entering the train, but Kayla's eye was caught by the electronic kiosk listing upcoming events at Stanford University, where she was excited to be an incoming freshman. Another kiosk, listing City of Palo Alto events, was surrounded by a group of young commuters just off the train, apparently looking for the start time for a concert that evening.

Kayla paused and turned a slow 360 degrees on the platform. Art seemed to be everywhere. She could see two sculptures on the train platform and a banner in the station breezeway crediting the travel-themed display curated by Stanford's Cantor Art Center. Under the banner, people wheeled bikes out of a large bike storage facility, mounted, and rode off. Opposite the banner, Kayla could see a line at the coffee and sandwich shop in the station, with people snagging grab-and-go dinner items from cases stocked by nearby restaurants.

Right behind the station, she could see a beautiful apartment building with a bright, light-filled ground floor lobby. Kayla was drawn to a lively event space that was hosting a big reception, with people in numerous clusters of conversation, balancing plates and cups in their hands.

Behind the apartment building, a broad paved path led diagonally to a street, and on the corner, she could see a gleaming hotel and conference center spire with the flag of the Stanford Shopping Center (that she would come to know as the intersection of Quarry Road and El Camino Real streets). She was happy to see a nearby place to get the things to make sure her dorm room could be fully kitted out—stylishly and functionally.

A steady stream of buses paused at a marked crosswalk before queuing up at a series of staggered bus bays west of the station. Many of the buses said Marguerite, and Kayla knew right away that she would be a regular rider of those Stanford shuttle buses.

Turning back toward the station, Kayla could see signs down a path toward University Plaza and into the city of Palo Alto. Kayla wanted to make sure her parents got settled in at their hotel off University Avenue. She helped them wheel their suitcases down a ramp and into a broad, brightly lit tunnel lined with murals. “Look Mom and Dad! Did you know all these amazing inventions, technologies, and companies got their start right here?” Kayla asked excitedly. “Look! Apple, Netflix, Google, Facebook, PayPal, Nvidia, Hewlett-Packard!” The faces of these company founders and their inventions were depicted in colorful murals that lined one wall, while on the opposite wall, the faces of people of every race and age were shown using these inventions.

Soon, Kayla and her parents were out of the tunnel gallery and on University Avenue. A series of shallow steps in a bowl-shaped plaza, like a pair of cupped hands, created a public space where people sat with faces turned to the late afternoon sun, while dozens of bicyclists rolled past using broad dedicated bike lanes. Kayla turned to her parents, “Let’s find the bike shop tomorrow!”

A row of stacked townhouses lined Alma Street, backing up to the train tracks. Up and down the street, people were opening their doors as they got home from work or as they exited with strollers or dogs on leashes for a walk through downtown Palo Alto or along the Embarcadero Shared Used Path. One of those residents was Felix, who works at a nonprofit providing social services just a couple of blocks away, off El Camino Real. Being able to buy this townhome had been a huge stretch for Felix and his partner, Ko, but it was life-changing. They had once been a two-car family, with long commutes in two directions, but upon moving to Palo Alto, they had been able to sell one car immediately. Ko’s employer offers Caltrain GoPasses as a workplace benefit, and now that they live so

near the train station, they sold their other car, too. The \$2,000 they had been spending monthly on personal cars went toward purchasing this new townhome.

Kayla and her parents looked into the big windows of restaurants, stores, hotels, coffee shops, galleries, apartment lobbies, and other businesses as they walked along University Avenue. Kayla made note of the location of a hardware store (she had posters to hang) just as they reached their hotel.

Fred owned the hardware store, and he had recently extended his hours to 7:30 p.m. to capture more trade from commuters returning home from work. The new rental and for-sale housing along Alma, Mitchell, Embarcadero, and El Camino Real streets had brought a notable uptick in his business. Many new customers had asked him so much about home maintenance and basic repair that Fred joked that he should hold classes. The response was serious and enthusiastic. The first “Saturday Sessions with Fred on Home Repairs” start next week.

Kayla watches the pedestrians meander along University Avenue as her parents check into their hotel. Kayla knows a lot about Stanford University, and she still pinches herself that she’s enrolled here. Looking around and thinking about her first impressions of the place she will be for the next four years, she registers the wonder of high-speed trains every 10 minutes, the fleets of buses immediately on hand to take her to her dorm and grocery stores, and how easy biking and walking will be. She notes other first impressions of Palo Alto—the spaces for art, the paths for walking and biking, and the plazas for sitting, talking, and gathering. The intimate scale of the streets, the lively and interesting storefronts, and the sidewalks filled with cafes and people walking are all inviting and welcoming.

She smiles at her parents, “There’s no place I’d rather be.”

Vision for the Palo Alto Transit Center

Building on information and insights from the study sponsors and from the stakeholders interviewed for this study, the panel outlined a new vision for the PATC that centers around a walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented development. The station area and surrounding streets would be home to walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented housing that blends a mix of housing for the workforce, seniors, and University faculty and staff. The ground floors of the buildings would be activated with resident- and transit-supported retail and public amenities. Additionally, development could incorporate a shared conference, research, and event space that would link Stanford University and Palo Alto.



ULI PANEL

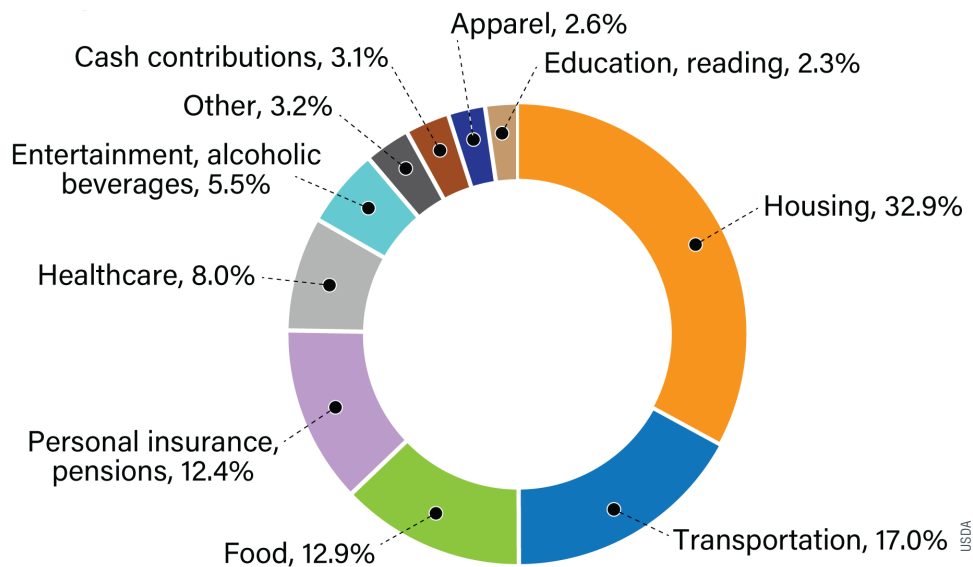
Housing and Implications for the PATC

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, HOUSING PRICES ARE SOARING. Nearly every major metropolitan area is experiencing a rise in rental rates and a shortage of for-sale housing. Homeowners who locked in low mortgage interest rates during or before the COVID-19 pandemic are reticent to sell their homes, either daunted by the prospect of a new mortgage at today's higher interest rates or unable to find new housing that meets their needs, which further reduces housing product turnover in the market. Added to this conundrum is a smaller supply of home builders, following a number of 2008 recession-induced closures, and significant increases in construction materials and labor costs. A constrained supply of existing units and a limited supply of new construction have landed the United States in a housing deficit estimated at well over 4 million housing units. California represents a large share of the country's unmet housing demand, with an estimated 1.3 million to 3.4 million more housing units needed across the state.

Unlike previous housing shortages, the current shortage is unique in that it appears to affect homeowners and renters of all incomes and across all geographies. In 2025, 27 governors from across the United States noted housing as a priority in their State of the State addresses. In response, jurisdictions are taking action, with many implementing any number of the following measures:

- Revising building codes to allow construction of just one staircase in small multifamily buildings;
- Adding accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinances;
- Creating missing middle initiatives designed to stimulate construction of duplexes, townhomes, triplexes, and other "gentle" density buildings that can fit alongside single and multifamily structures;
- Eliminating single-family zoning;
- Reducing or eliminating required parking for higher-density residential developments;

Share of U.S. household consumer expenditures by major categories, 2023



The USDA Economic Research Service, using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2023, points to the significant resources U.S. households dedicate to housing and transportation.

Note: "Other" includes personal care products, tobacco, and miscellaneous expenditures. Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2023.

- Subsidizing low-income and workforce housing; and
- Exploring housing trust funds, patient capital investment funds, and land trusts.

In addition to the above measures, California turned to its Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for help in meeting the housing need, asking Caltrans to provide the following assistance:

- Provide land;
- Fund housing at transit;
- Finance housing near transit;
- Use housing and land use to improve transportation system performance, as measured by a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT), reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, and improved and increased transit access; and
- Mitigate environmental harms (e.g., stormwater runoff, air pollution) with housing in the right place.

Housing and Transportation

Housing and transportation are inextricably tied. Representing the two largest expenses in typical U.S. households, housing costs and transportation costs combine to create significant burdens on households. Decades of underbuilding homes and building those homes far from centers of activity have only increased the financial strain on households. There is an opportunity to instead increase housing densities and place those densities closer to activity centers, which can provide beneficial transportation efficiencies through public transit options and assist households in reducing their transportation costs.

Although the number of stations along fixed rail lines in the United States has doubled in the last 20 years, housing with proximate transit access remains relatively limited. This scarcity creates demand, with the value of real estate near transit generally reflecting that greater demand.

The benefits of locating housing near transit are numerous. Co-locating housing and transit in the midst of a housing crisis can amplify those benefits.

- For the community, emissions reductions can be substantial and assist the jurisdiction in meeting its CO₂ reduction goals.
- Mobility and access are increased and enhanced for residents.
- TOD zoning provides numerous opportunities for increases in height, density, and lot coverage while requiring the fewest number of parking spaces.
- Residents enjoy lower transportation costs, realized through the reduction or elimination of personal vehicles.
- Municipalities enjoy greater economic vitality benefits through the addition of commercial uses near the station.
- There are also safety benefits for both transit riders and residents with the addition of more people in the station area and more “eyes on the street.”

The benefits to the climate and air quality are also of significant note. The California Air Resources Board reported that TOD projects in the United States have resulted in an [average reduction of 30 to 40 percent](#) in VMT per household. This reduction in VMT can begin to have a sizable impact on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

- “Integrated spatial planning to achieve compact and resource-efficient urban growth through co-location of residences and jobs, mixed land use, and transit-oriented development could reduce GHG emissions between 23 and 26 percent by 2050 compared to the business-as-usual scenario.” ([IPCC](#), 2022)

Economic Vitality focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

Main Street America

- At the project scale (no greater than a census tract), TOD has a 31 percent reduction potential of GHG emissions. ([CAPCOA](#), 2021)
- Vehicle-miles traveled decline due to transit use per passenger mile ranges from 3 to 9 VMT. ([Ali et al., 2021](#))
- “People who live, work and/or shop in TODs drive 20 to 40 percent less and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2.5 to 3.7 tons per year per household.” ([Maryland DOT](#))

Senate Bill 79

In recent years, the California State legislature has been particularly focused on addressing the state’s housing crisis. In October of 2025, Senate Bill 79 was signed into law, overriding local zoning limitations and facilitating higher-density development, particularly for housing, near transit stations.

Specifically, SB 79 provides that qualified transit-oriented housing development projects “shall be an allowed use” for sites zoned for residential, mixed, or commercial development within one-half or one-quarter mile of transit stops located in “urban transit counties,” provided certain requirements are met. The law also eliminates the associated minimum parking requirements typically required of housing developments.

This SB 79 upzoning applies to counties with more than 15 passenger rail stations. Although “passenger rail stations” is not defined within the bill, bill sponsors, including a coalition of housing and urban planning advocates, state that jurisdictions in eight California counties would be affected—San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara (including Palo Alto), Alameda, Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange—and the law will take effect beginning July 1, 2026.

SB 79’s maximum height and density standards are as follows and may not be precluded by a local municipality’s development standards:

- 95 feet in height and a density of 160 dwelling units per acre with a floor-area ratio (FAR) of 4.5
- 55 feet in height and 80 dwelling units per acre with an FAR of 2.5

Municipalities retain various options for lowering these standards for individual sites or exempting certain sites from SB 79. There is also the potential to accommodate housing at a

much higher density in a smaller area using a jurisdiction's own zoning designations, the result of which provides the increase in available housing quantity that SB 79 seeks to stimulate.

With the introduction of this law, the demand for transit could significantly increase. There is also the potential to improve revenues and the fiscal health of transit agencies and create a virtuous cycle where more funding and ridership lead to more frequent and improved service.

Palo Alto Transit Center

With the passage of SB 79, the PATC has an opportunity to be a “first mover” in California, putting the principles of the law into practice and setting the pace for implementation in other communities across the state. In addition to the excellent electrified intercity rail transit service, which has the second-highest ridership in the Caltrain system, and various local and regional bus services, the PATC features a number of other important assets.

Strong partners. Partnerships will be key to any housing development in the area, and SB 79 could provide the rallying point for the various partners to meaningfully increase housing density in the area. Calling on the longstanding partnerships among the multiple transit agencies, landowners, and local jurisdictions, the City of Palo Alto, Stanford University, and VTA can partner to lead the effort and build on the foundation established through this panel.

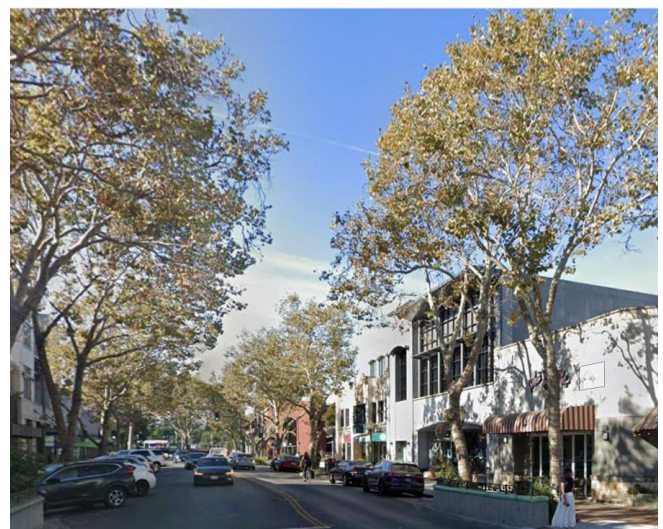
Opportunities for new development. The geography around the transit center is marked by several parcels that could be developed for high-density housing. These potential housing parcels are generally west of and separated by the rail lines from Palo Alto's historically low-rise downtown.

Active users are already in place. The PATC has a strong population of transit riders already accessing its transit resources. The effective use of the No Net New Commute Trips standard put in place by Santa Clara County in 2000 for Stanford University and the Stanford Hospital's entitlement requirement for reduced vehicle trips has encouraged more transit ridership, particularly by Stanford students, staff, and faculty. The PATC's ridership is largely driven by Caltrain GoPass use, by Stanford University and Stanford Medicine users.

Multimodal transportation connects well to transit. In addition to transit and vehicular transportation in and around the area, there are also a significant number of people walking and bicycling near the transit center. There is a high modal split to bicycling and walking, and the surrounding area provides a number of low-stress bicycle routes that connect users across long distances with few interruptions. Finally, the area has high participation in the [Safe Routes to School](#) program and tracks a high share of bike trips in home-to-school travel segments.



ULI PANEL



GOOGLE STREET VIEW

The PATC provides ready access to a number of other assets in the area, including parks, Stanford University and the Arboretum, and downtown Palo Alto.



Land Use and Development

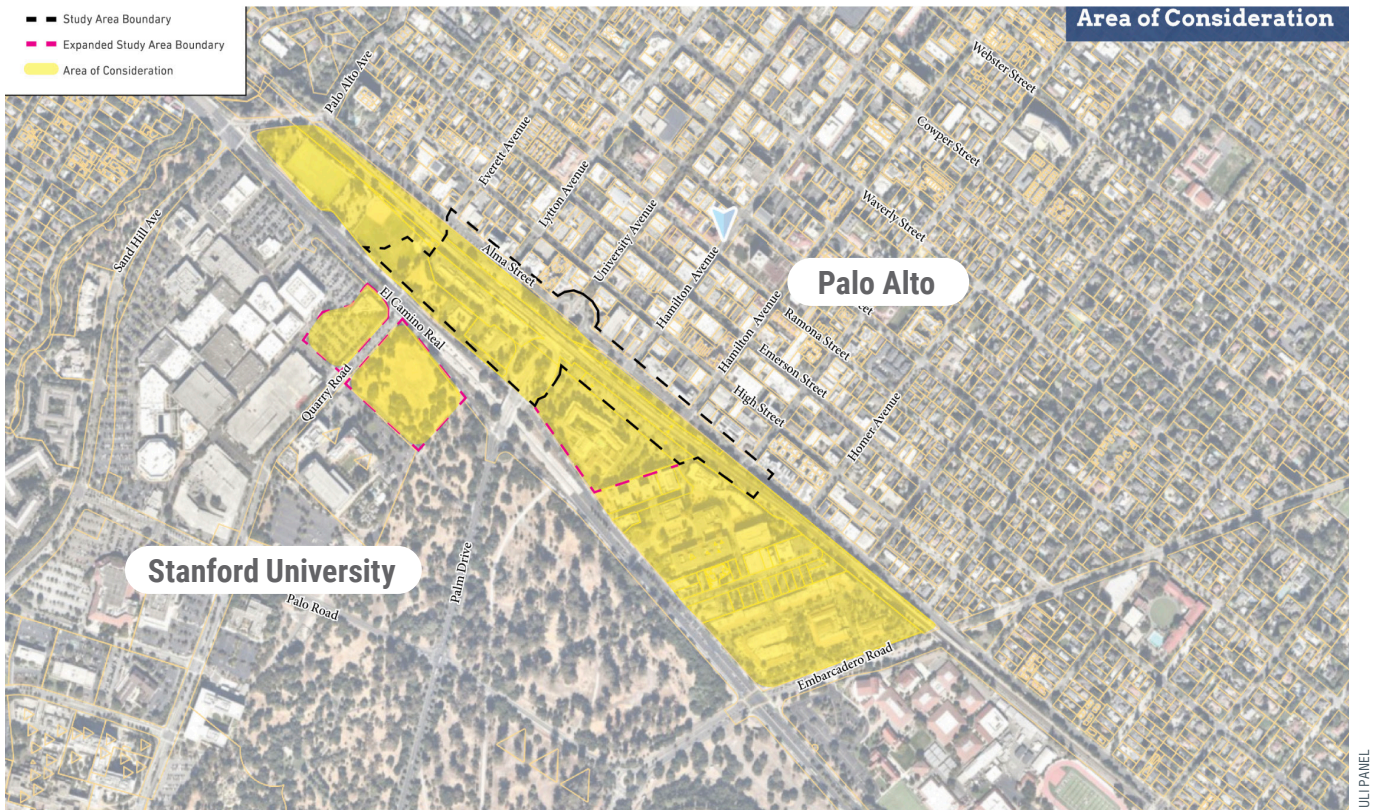
THE PANEL SET OUT TO CREATE A LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK that transit center partners could use to implement the type of transit-oriented development that would make excellent use of the existing transportation access while also significantly increasing the amount of available housing in the area.

The transit center occupies a uniquely strategic position as the primary gateway between Downtown Palo Alto, Stanford University, and the regional transit (Caltrain and bus) networks. The convergence of commuter rail, regional and university transit, bicycle connections, and heavy pedestrian activity makes it one of the most accessible and visible sites in the city.

From a land use and zoning perspective, the center's connectivity creates a rare opportunity to intensify development in a location that is already supported by excellent multimodal infrastructure. The site's current high levels of pedestrian traffic and transit use justify a shift toward denser, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development that integrates

housing, University-related uses, and public amenities while preserving and activating the historic Palo Alto Station.

There is also a compelling opportunity to unlock significant land value around the station area. Key parcels around the station have already been assembled and are under the control of a limited number of owners, all of whom have expressed interest in supporting the transformation of the study area into a vibrant and successful transit-oriented development. Through activation by these surrounding participating landowners, development and municipal partners have the opportunity to use land value capture to fund the infrastructure improvements posed by the panel, which will facilitate the



The study area, outlined in black, and the slightly broader area of consideration, highlighted in yellow, surround the Palo Alto Transit Center.

type of new development needed to address the community's housing shortage and the requirements outlined in SB 79.

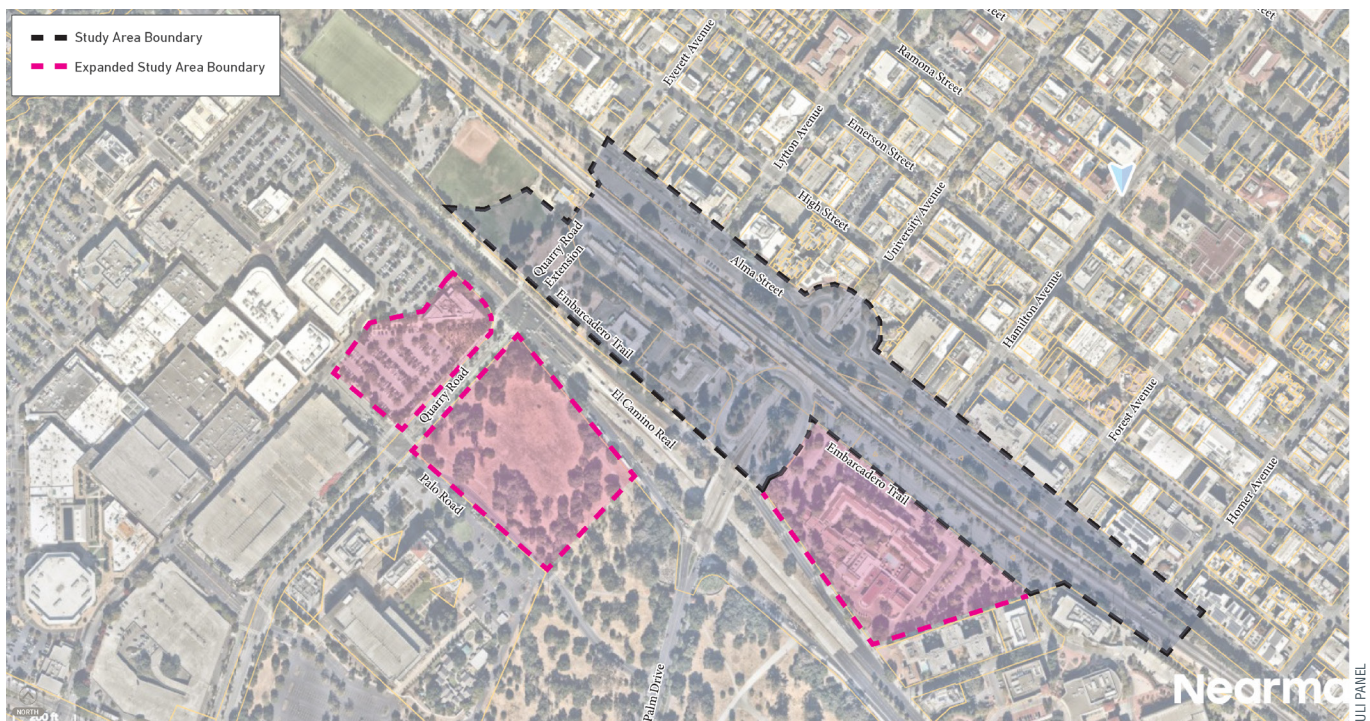
Redevelopment at this location would help bridge the physical and institutional divide between the city and the University, transforming the station into an active gateway that brings together multiple uses and key institutions. With appropriate zoning updates—such as a higher base FAR, no parking minimums within [Tier 1 transit areas](#), and form-based design standards—the area could deliver substantial new housing and meet state TOD mandates under SB 79.

Importantly, the City of Palo Alto and Stanford University can serve as statewide innovators in demonstrating how a public sector and university partnership can deliver SB 79—compliant, transit-adjacent housing and mixed-use redevelopment that supports innovation and mobility. This type of development approach has the potential to advance a number of key measures, including advancing California's goals for sustainability, affordability, and integrated land use planning; aligning with [Palo Alto's 2030 Comprehensive Plan](#) housing goals of increasing affordable and smaller housing units; and delivering workforce, faculty, and student housing close to transit.

Land Use Recommendations

The City of Palo Alto's 2030 Comprehensive Plan states, "Palo Alto is perceived as a built-out city and has a substantially higher number of jobs than residents. This imbalance has contributed to skyrocketing housing costs, affecting long-time and new residents and creating concern about Palo Alto's future diversity. Providing a mix of housing types is a community priority, and this Plan seeks to increase the supply of housing that is affordable. The Plan also safeguards existing single-family neighborhoods, encourages smaller units such as studios and cottages, sets the stage for redevelopment where higher densities are allowed in appropriate locations and includes new policies to ensure that the remaining housing sites are used efficiently. The 2023–2031 Housing Element is updated more frequently than the rest of this Plan and must respond to very specific State requirements."

In order to meet the requirements of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan and create a vibrant urban place, the panel recommends that the future land use within the study area, as noted in the plan, be updated to align with land uses within the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The panel believes that both the Transit-Oriented Residential (TOR) and Mixed Use (MU)



In addition to the defined study area, the panel also considered a number of surrounding parcels that could benefit from revised land uses and zoning.

designations need to be rewritten or combined into a single future land use category, such as a unified Transit Mixed-Use (TMU) category. By doing so, the panel believes that Palo Alto will have a coherent, defensible, and effective TOD and housing policy that complies with State law and responds to market realities. For purposes of this study, the mixed-use designation has been modified because the TOD designation does not currently allow for any commercial uses.

The following land use types (as defined in the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan) are recommended within this study area:

- **Revised – Mixed Use:** The Mixed-Use designation promotes compact, walkable, transit-supportive districts where housing, employment, retail, and civic uses coexist within a cohesive urban fabric. Development under this designation should create active, pedestrian-oriented streets and contribute to a lively public realm that supports daily life without dependence on the automobile. Typically, mixed-use developments have retail (to support transit users and residents of the development) on the ground floor and residences above. Consistent with the 2030 Comprehensive Plan's encouragement of housing near transit centers, higher-density multifamily housing may be allowed in specific locations.

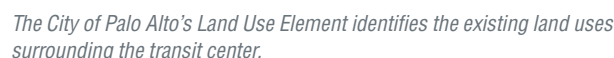
- **Commercial Hotel:** This category allows facility use by temporary overnight occupants on a transient basis, such as hotels and motels, with associated conference centers and similar uses. Restaurants and other eating facilities, meeting rooms, small retail shops, personal services, and other services ancillary to the hotel are also allowed. This category can be applied in combination with another land use category.
- **Major Institution/Special Facilities:** This category includes institutional, academic, governmental, and community service uses and lands that are either publicly owned or operated as nonprofit organizations. Examples are hospitals and City facilities. Consistent with the 2030 Comprehensive Plan's encouragement of housing near transit centers, higher-density multifamily housing may be allowed in specific locations.

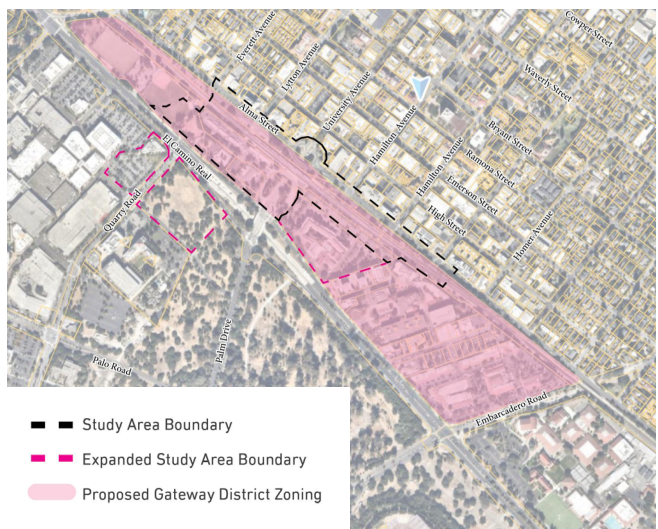
Zoning Recommendations

In order to create the welcoming gateway envisioned by the study sponsors and pave the way for evolving land uses, the panel believes that zoning modifications will be required. These evolving land uses will better support transit-oriented development and provide a foundation upon which to reinforce—and not replace—the strengths of downtown Palo Alto and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Encourage new infill development and redevelopment of existing structures supported by extending existing block patterns and added height and density to support ridership and housing goals. An improved and continuous public realm would feature pedestrian-focused streetscapes with plazas and small parks. Urban design elements would feature mid-rise density, buildings that visually transition with the surrounding context, and support active and transparent ground floors. Mobility and streetscape improvements would feature a highly functional street network, complete with wide sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and integrated transit access. Zoning updates that allow and facilitate this environment would support an improved experience for transit riders, residents in surrounding housing units, and visitors to the area. Specifically, the panel recommends the following actions related to zoning.

■ ■ Study Area Boundary
 ■ ■ Expanded Study Area Boundary
 ■ ■ Major Institution/Special Facility
 ■ ■ Mixed-Use (Transit Oriented)
 ■ ■ Hotel Commercial (including Conference Center)





The proposed gateway district is noted in pink shading in the map above.

the 2023–2031 Housing Element’s Site Inventory, thereby enabling other development types. If necessary, the panel recommends a text amendment to the PF zoning to do so. Sites designated for housing in the Certified 2023–2031 Housing Element’s Site Inventory allow residential and mixed-use development at densities consistent with the adopted Element, notwithstanding any limitation in the PF district. The panel also recommends additional exploration of how to incorporate differing levels of housing affordability in the future residential development in the Gateway District.

Create a new gateway district and update PTOD zoning.

The City of Palo Alto should create a new Gateway University Avenue Station District and update its Pedestrian Transit-Oriented Development (PTOD) zoning to better align with state law and the redevelopment vision for the Palo Alto Transit Center study area.

California SB 79 requires local jurisdictions to allow increased residential density and building height within transit-oriented areas served by major transit, including rail stations. The intent of SB 79 is to remove local zoning constraints that limit housing production near high-capacity transit by establishing minimum density and height allowances that override conflicting local standards.

California Senate Bill 2097 (SB 2097) eliminates minimum off-street parking requirements for residential and mixed-use development located within one-half mile of a major transit stop. SB 2097 is intended to reduce development costs, promote housing affordability, and support transit use by shifting parking from a mandated standard to a market-driven approach, while still allowing jurisdictions to regulate parking



In Dublin, Ohio, the 30-acre Bridge Park is a good example of a walkable, mixed-use community built close to transportation resources while remaining focused on the pedestrian experience.



The Van Aken District in Shaker Heights, Ohio, transformed a former six-point intersection near a Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority station into a pedestrian-centric, transit-oriented retail development.

through maximums, shared parking, and transportation demand management strategies.

The current PTOD zoning framework in Palo Alto is generally well-suited to support mixed-use, infill-focused transit-oriented development by right. Existing land uses within the study area should be allowed to remain, recognizing the incremental and adaptive nature of redevelopment in an established urban context. However, the panel finds that the existing density, height, and parking standards conflict with

the intent and requirements of SB 79 and SB 2097, and that these standards materially constrain the ability of the area to redevelop as a high-performing TOD district.

To address these issues, the panel recommends the following actions:

- Update PTOD height and density standards to allow development up to a minimum threshold of 12 stories within the Palo Alto Transit Center study area, consistent with state TOD policy and the area's role as a regional transit gateway.
- Explicitly permit mixed-use development by-right within the PTOD district, including residential, office, retail, and active ground-floor uses, to support a vibrant, transit-supportive environment.
- Eliminate parking minimums within the PTOD district and allow shared parking provisions, parking maximums, and transportation demand management strategies consistent with SB 2097.
- Adopt the revised or newly established PTOD zoning district and apply it to the Palo Alto Transit Center study area to enable redevelopment consistent with the panel's recommendations.
- Establish a Gateway University Avenue Station District that reflects its regional role, transit access, and redevelopment potential.

This approach aligns the City's zoning framework with State law, removes regulatory barriers to transit-oriented infill,

and provides a clear, predictable pathway for redevelopment that advances housing production, economic vitality, and sustainable mobility at the Palo Alto Transit Center. The panel believes that by taking these steps and extending the proposed PTOD zoning to the area surrounding the study area, the benefits of TOD would be maximized. The panel also recommends that this new district be guided by City staff and the City's Architectural Review Board, with development review aligning with the following principles:

Sound and Sustainable Planning

- Proximate to basic services, jobs, and amenities
- Mobility rich: near transit centers/corridors, ped/bike friendly
- Contextually appropriate: community connection and neighborhood integration
- Creates "place": establishes network of experiences
- Greater height: resource efficiency and company design

Accessible and Affordable

- Greater density: leverage economies of scale
- Feasible design standards
- Streamlined review process
- Creates opportunities for future generations: expansion of housing choices

Collaborative Partnership

- Viewed as beneficial by existing lessee(s)
- Lessee is motivated and incentivized to build
- Aligned vision
- Economically feasible: barriers removed

Economic Vitality

- Meets Comp Plan principle of additive housing
- Enhances City's economic health
- Synergistic with existing uses
- Preserves existing retail and commercial square footage



This rendering illustrates how additional density could take shape around the transit center.

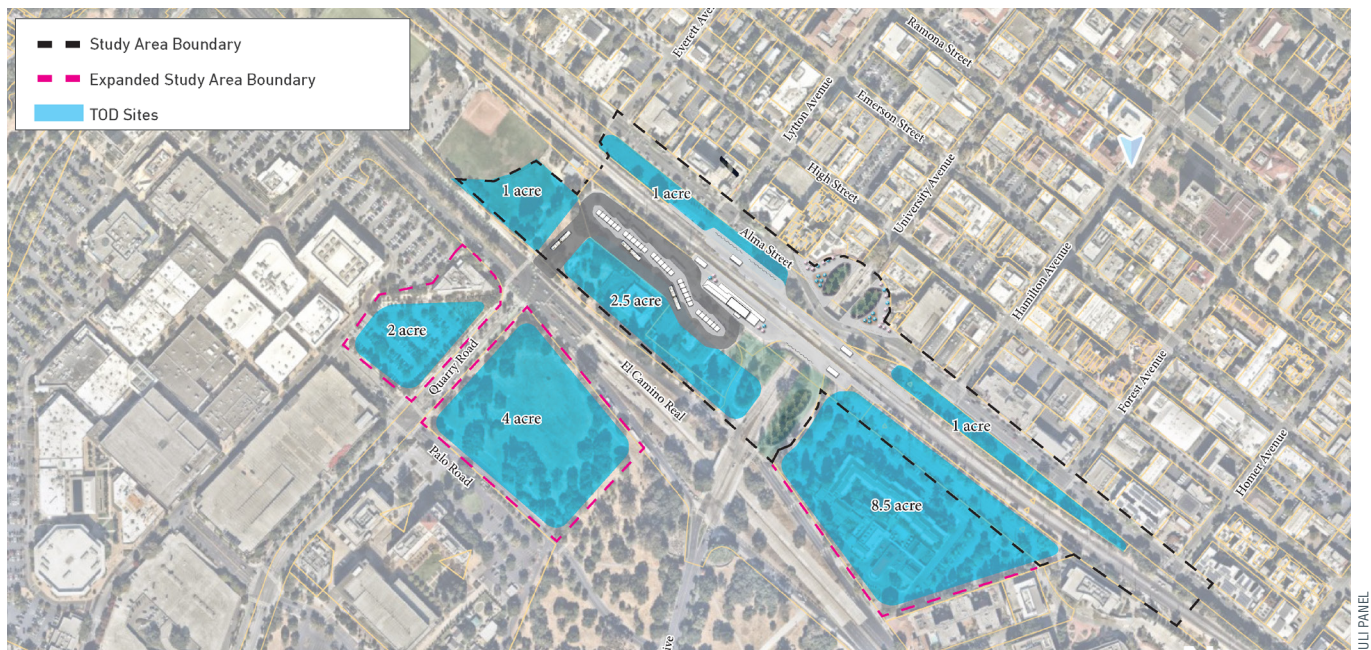
Best Practices In Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-oriented development is characterized by compact, mixed-use, residential, and commercial development that is clustered around a transit stop or a rail station. (ULI, [*Active Transportation and Real Estate: The Next Frontier*](#))

Ten Principles for Successful Development Around Transit

Over the years, ULI has evaluated a wide range of developments focused around transit centers, particularly bus and rail stations. In the Ten Principles for Successful Development Around Transit report, ULI distills its findings down to 10 fundamentals that can help cities and developers maximize the benefits of integrating transit in development, including setting vision, creating partnerships, and understanding the role of parking, placemaking, and mixing uses.

- 1. Make it better with a vision.** The creation of a broader vision can help ensure that all developers pursue compatible strategies that reinforce the transit vision—and that those strategies will be supported, rather than opposed, by the surrounding community.
- 2. Apply the power of partnerships.** Transit agencies, local governments, or both may take a more active role, through partnerships with the development community. To be effective, these partnerships must be carefully crafted to benefit each of the partners—just as partnerships in the private sector would.
- 3. Think development when thinking about transit.** Opportunities for creating higher densities, and for mixing product types to market to a broader spectrum of incomes, should be sought during transit project development.
- 4. Get the parking right.** Too much parking makes the area less pedestrian friendly and wastes space that could be used for the types of development that increase ridership. Too little parking—or the perception that there is too little parking—can undermine the economic viability of projects built to take advantage of transit, making leasing or sales difficult.
- 5. Build a place, not a project.** A major new transit station in a community should bring more than the trains. It presents an opportunity not only for a project at the station but for a full-fledged transit-centered community, with all the attendant economic and cultural benefits.
- 6. Make retail development market driven, not transit driven.** The most important considerations for retail development are location, market, and design, and proximity to transit is not typically a prime consideration in most markets. Transit access can strengthen the retail market, but the market must be viable without the transit component.
- 7. Mix uses, but not necessarily in the same place.** A transit corridor that offers an advantageous mix of uses can be used to integrate a number of separate activity nodes, particularly when the various uses are close together, easily accessible, and support each other.
- 8. Make buses a great idea.** To encourage ridership, buses need to be attractive, clean, fast, fun, simple to use, and offer regular, reliable service.
- 9. Encourage every price point to live around transit.** Just as people from every part of the economic spectrum ride transit, people from every part of the economic spectrum like to live near transit. Residential development around transit can be so successful that it attracts wealthier households. Preserving and expanding affordable housing is important and is a special concern for development around transit as lower-income transit users often represent the core of the ridership.
- 10. Engage corporate attention.** If transit is viewed as a valuable tool for recruiting scarce talent, companies will include “good transit access” on their checklist of considerations for site selection.



The panel considered how new housing units could be added to the station area, adding density to the area while also blending in with adjacent densities. Using the expanded study area boundary, the panel identified sites for potential development of the gateway district overtime.



At three stories, these multifamily buildings can add density to the area while providing a gentle transition of density from medium-density buildings down to the single-family housing found in surrounding neighborhoods.



Townhomes are a good low-rise housing option that can provide both rental and homeownership opportunities while also gently adding density.

Development Recommendations

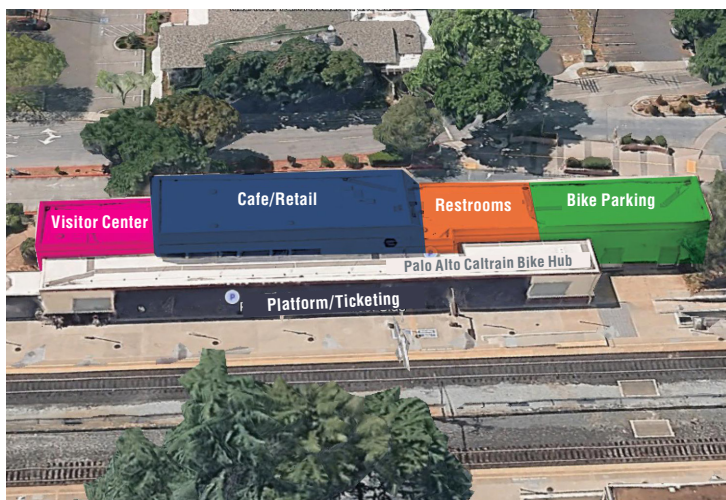
With zoning modifications in place, new development at the station can begin to support the vision of the station area as a hub for transit-oriented, mixed-use, and walkable development. By focusing density and activity in the immediate surroundings, a lively community hub can begin to take shape, better supporting transit riders, residents, and the broader community. Housing should be integrated with civic and innovation uses, all of which should feature transparent and active ground-floor spaces. Respecting the historic station is critical, and context-sensitive development should also include at least 10 percent open space or

equivalent public amenities. The panel does recommend that the MacArthur Park building be relocated to allow for greater densities at the sites closest to the transit center.

Update development standards. The following core standards should be included in the zoning modifications or in a new zoning overlay district. The permitted uses recommended by the panel include transit centers, university facilities, multifamily residential, mixed-use (with incidental ground-floor retail for transit users and visitors), underground parking structures, and townhome developments. Conditional uses could also include restaurants and above-ground parking structures, and stand-alone surface parking lots should be prohibited going forward (except where exempt below). The

panel's recommended updated Gateway District development standards would include the following key elements.

- Permitted land uses.** Typical permitted land uses should include transit facilities, university and civic buildings, multifamily housing, and mixed-use with active ground floors in vertically and horizontally integrated development. Larger multifamily and mixed-income residential buildings are encouraged near major transit stops, and government or institutional facilities may be incorporated. Structured or underground parking is also allowed when designed as part of an active, walkable district. Secondary land uses can include public plazas, small parks, and open spaces integrated with development. Secondary uses also include educational, religious, and assembly facilities that activate the public realm. Surface parking should be limited and designed for future redevelopment or conversion to public space.
- Building heights and density.** In the area near transit centers like the PATC, medium- to high-density development should be encouraged in buildings that feature a minimum of three stories and an average of five or more stories. Height limits, beyond those governed by seismic and building codes, should be eliminated. Building intensity is regulated by floor-area ratio, with a base FAR up to 3.0 and a 150–300 dwelling units per acre target. Development should support transit ridership and reduced automobile dependency. (Density bonuses are encouraged to satisfy the requirements of SB 79 with density transfers to this area on a 1:1 basis.)
- Infill and redevelopment.** New infill development should respect the orientation of existing street patterns while adding appropriate height, massing, and density.
- Setbacks and lot coverage.** Setbacks and coverage specifications should include zero-lot-line options and up to 90 percent lot coverage by buildings.
- Public space.** Public space minimums are set at 10 percent of the site area, which should be dedicated to publicly accessible open space and amenities or provided through an equivalent arrangement, such as off-site improvements, publicly accessible plazas, or the inclusion of public facilities such as restrooms, seating, or other community-serving spaces.
- Transportation.** Transportation improvements should support a fine-grained, interconnected street network with wide sidewalks, protected bicycle facilities, and frequent transit connections. Alleys and service lanes should support deliveries, waste collection, and structured parking access without disrupting pedestrian continuity.
- Parking.** Within Tier 1 transit areas (as defined by SB 79), no off-street parking should be required, except for accessible, loading, or service spaces needed for emergency and operational access. Outside of Tier 1 areas, developers may provide off-street parking through shared or joint-use agreements with existing facilities within a walkable distance (1/4- to 1/2-mile), subject to the approval of the City's planning director, and maintained for the life of the project. Lining structured parking



Uses within the transit center could be better defined and spread across the building, providing clarity for visitors and transit riders.



New uses within the transit center could include an information center, cafe, and seating.

facilities with active ground floor uses is encouraged outside of Tier 1 areas, as is on-street parking and secure short- and long-term bicycle parking.

Activation

The panel believes that the opportunities for new development at and around the transit center are exciting. With the additional impetus provided by SB 79, greater densities and building heights can blend into the surrounding neighborhoods, making use of the transit orientation of the development while honoring the downtown Palo Alto context. The panel believes that any new development around the PATC should prioritize transit, pedestrian activity, public safety, and ground floor activation through the following measures.

Use buildings to support active spaces. Building design can play an important role in helping to activate the surrounding public realm. Building frontages should incorporate transparent

facades, human-scale details, and accessible entries that contribute to a continuous, lively streetscape. Building design should also encourage transit use over single-occupancy vehicle trips, particularly for long-term residential use. On-site vehicle parking should be limited to essential services, short-term needs, and shared mobility options.

Activate the PATC in the short term. While development area partners begin the long-term process of station and area-wide development and redevelopment, there are other short-term activations that can add vibrancy and support more transit ridership. The panel re-envisioned the station building as a series of four primary spaces fronting the western edge of the building, featuring distinct spaces for a café and retail offerings, restrooms, bicycle parking, and a new visitor center that reinforces the transit center gateway concept. Along the eastern edge, close to the rail line, the long platform and ticketing area would continue to provide convenient access for arrivals and departures.

Mass Timber

The panel recommends that the sponsor encourage the use of mass timber in new mid-rise podium developments within the Gateway District. Although timber is not a new building material, the innovative engineered formats being used for mass timber projects are new and delivering multiple benefits to developers, building owners, tenants, and communities.

Mass timber offers certain advantages over steel-and-concrete construction. It weighs less, can be prefabricated for quick assembly on site, requires fewer workers to assemble, and results in less associated construction waste. Sourced from responsibly managed forests and reused after the end of a building's life, mass timber can contribute to carbon sequestration. In contrast, the raw materials required and the manufacturing practices for concrete produce a concerning amount of embodied carbon.

Made of pre-engineered wood, mass timber can exhibit high levels of fire resistance. The timber columns of mass timber projects are lighter and yet over-built so that in the event of a fire, the columns can reduce down without impacting the structural integrity of the building.

Finally, when exposed, wood's natural look is appealing to tenants and occupants.



Mass timber building construction, as seen in the Carbon12 building, provides a number of ecological benefits, including the reduction of carbon associated with traditional concrete construction.



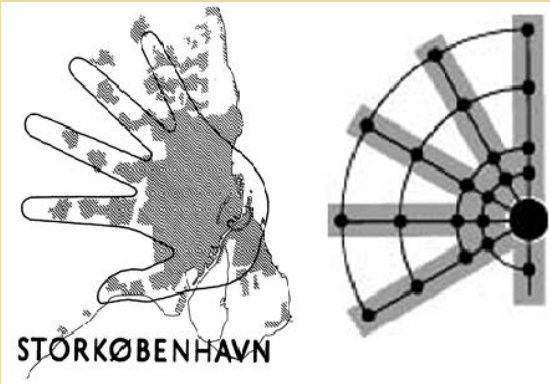
The interior of The Canyons development uses mass timber building materials as a feature of the units' interiors.

Case study:
Copenhagen Finger Plan

Copenhagen is an exceptional case study for transit-oriented development, particularly for smaller, rail-adjacent urban centers such as downtown Palo Alto. The success of Copenhagen’s transportation network is rooted in a decades-old regional plan that systematically clustered growth around rail and facilitated a high degree of transit connectivity.

Three key features put Copenhagen at the top of the list of effective transit-oriented development: the City follows a long-term, integrated plan (the Finger Plan), it encourages bicycling as the primary first- and last-mile connector, and it prioritizes transit and active transportation over personal vehicle use.

The Finger Plan: Copenhagen’s entire metropolitan structure is the result of the visionary Finger Plan, a comprehensive 1947 land-use strategy that codified transit-oriented development on a regional scale. The plan envisioned Copenhagen as a hand, with the dense central business district (CBD) as the palm of the hand and five slender corridors of urban development as the fingers, extending outward along existing and planned S-train commuter rail lines. Growth in the city was deliberately concentrated along the rail lines, with each station representing a high-density, mixed-use town center (similar in function and scale to downtown Palo Alto). The critical innovation in Copenhagen’s plan was maintaining large, protected green wedges of agricultural and recreational land between the urban corridors, preventing urban sprawl and guaranteeing residents retain easy access to nature. This innovation also ensured that the remaining urbanized areas developed as compact, transit-supportive centers.



Copenhagen’s transit system calls to mind fingers on a hand, with each digit representing a transit line that connects to a central hub and separated by swaths of green open space and agricultural land.

S-train as the regional backbone: The S-train, which is a hybrid between commuter rail and rapid transit, is the key piece of infrastructure for Copenhagen, providing connections between dense, local town centers along the fingers to the city center, creating a functional, radial network for regional commuting. The S-trains run at high frequencies—running every 10 minutes or less on weekdays—which is essential to make transit competitive with driving.

World-class cycling integration (first- and last-mile solutions): Relevant to Palo Alto, which already has a strong biking culture and relatively short travel distances, Copenhagen elevated the bicycle to a primary mode of transit, seamlessly integrating bicycling infrastructure with its rail network.

The result of this integrated transit and planning approach is a city with one of the highest cycling rates in the world. A significant portion of suburban S-train commuters cycle to or from the station, and approximately one-third of suburban

Key Bicyclist Features	
Strategy	Description & Key Takeaways
Free Bike-on-Train	Bicycles are allowed on the S-trains for free, significantly extending the commuting range of rail users. A commuter can cycle 5 miles to a station, ride the train 20 miles, and then cycle another 5 miles to their office.
Dedicated Infrastructure	The network consists of wide, curb-separated cycle tracks that are elevated from the street, providing a safe, predictable, and comfortable experience for cyclists of all ages and abilities. This is distinct from simple bike lanes or shared roads.
“Green Wave”	Traffic lights along major bicycle thoroughfares are synchronized to allow a continuous flow of cyclists moving at a comfortable, average speed (e.g., 20 km/h or 12 mph). This makes cycling faster than driving during rush hour.
Station Amenities	Stations feature abundant, high-quality, and well-maintained bicycle parking facilities right next to the entrance, prioritizing the cyclist’s experience.

rail-users connect with a bike trip. For many of Copenhagen's residents, the commute is bike-to-train or bike-to-train-to-walk.

Coordinated development and value capture: In newer developments, like the Ørestad New Town, Copenhagen took TOD a step further, leading with transit rather than integrating it after development is complete. Using this approach, the Metro line was built in advance of development in order to steer and anchor growth, and urban density is highest directly at the transit hubs, providing a clear visual and functional hierarchy that supports the rail system with high commercial and residential activity. This transit-first approach positions Ørestad as a prime example of building transit to shape the city, rather than vice versa.

Example: Hellerup Station: This S-train station in an inner-ring suburb of Copenhagen is known for its strong multimodal connectivity and has a number of features that could be applied to downtown Palo Alto. This station is one of the most important hubs on the system and is served by multiple S-train lines as well as the F-line (Ring Line), which is orbital and allows for suburb-to-suburb travel without going through the CBD. The Hellerup Station is also a major interchange, with connections to the regional (RE) trains and larger destinations outside the S-train network. Buses serve the station and include high-frequency routes, and there is a more distant connection to the M3 City Circle Metro Line.

Takeaways for the PATC: The Hellerup Station demonstrates how to successfully layer multiple rail and bus lines in a constrained, established urban area. It is a key transfer point for people coming from the outer fingers to transfer to the Ring Line or a bus, reducing reliance on the central station. Finally, this is a station where the focus is on high-volume transfer efficiency and design alignment of a major transportation interchange with an existing, affluent, mixed-use community.

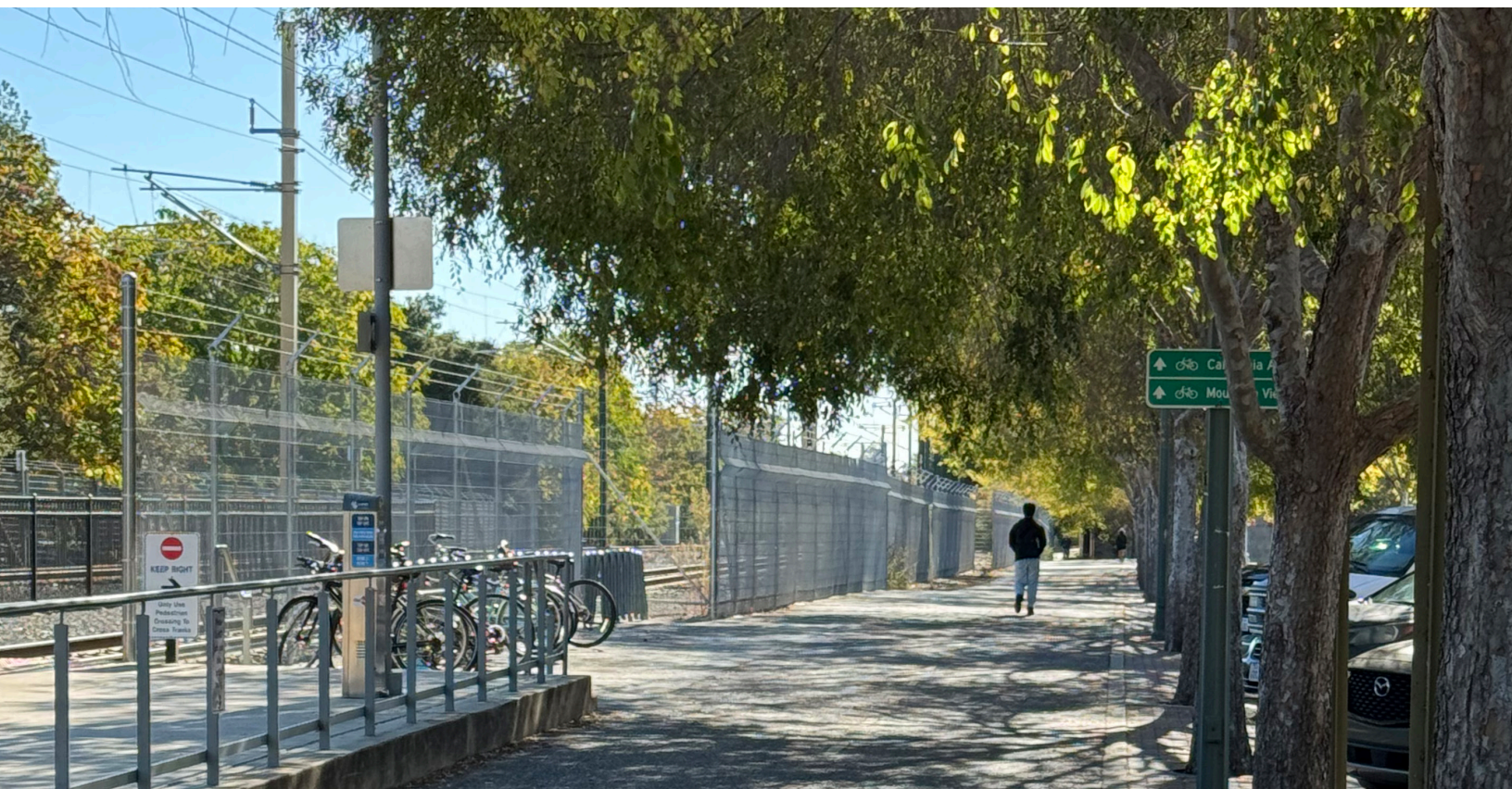
Example: Ballerup Station: This outer-ring suburban S-train station is on the Frederikssund Line (a middle corridor along the Finger Plan) and is a classic example of a combined suburban transportation hub and primary town center. Ballerup is a key stop along the line and, at times, serves as a terminus for S-train lines. The station features a large, adjacent bus terminal that serves as the terminus for many local bus lines that feed the station from the surrounding

low-density and rural areas outside the Finger Plan corridor. Recent development around the station transformed a "traffic zone dominated by high-speed traffic and cars" into an attractive, pedestrian-friendly central square. The station plaza now connects the S-train, the bus terminal, and the city's main pedestrian retail street, prioritizing a positive first impression for those arriving on public transit. Creative design elements, such as dynamic lighting, further that positive impression while also enhancing safety and placemaking.

Takeaways for the PATC: The Ballerup Station is a good example of rail-bus integration for first- and last-mile connectivity. Ballerup illustrates how a bus network can be explicitly designed to feed a rail line. The local buses collect riders from the broader suburban area and connect them directly at the station's integrated bus terminal, ensuring the rail line (S-train) gets maximum ridership.

Key design takeaways: When considering station redesign and redevelopment in pursuit of a more accessible and seamless experience, the following elements stand out as important and effective features of the Copenhagen Finger Plan and related station designs.

- **Zero-footprint transfers:** The distance between the bus stop and the train platform entrance is important. Minimizing this distance and reducing the effort required for the transfer is key to encouraging integrated ridership.
- **Pedestrian-centric plazas:** While plazas often serve as spaces for automobile drivers to drop off transit riders, these plazas should instead serve as a vibrant, shared, and human-scaled space that connects transit riders directly to local retail. The recent redesign of the Ballerup Station is a good example of this shift in focus.
- **Bicycle access:** Abundant, secured bike parking facilities that integrate seamlessly into the station design are a hallmark of all S-train stations and a feature that further encourages car-free commuting.
- **Information and wayfinding:** Signs and digital screens must coordinate the arrival and departure times and platforms for all modes—train, regional rail, and bus—in a unified system. The Copenhagen network uses an integrated approach across all transit agencies.



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Mobility and Transit Center Design

THE PALO ALTO TRANSIT CENTER and its immediate surroundings form a major transportation hub, offering a variety of mobility options for commuters and travelers. Caltrain electric service provides an essential connection to San Francisco, San José, and other points north and south. The station is elevated above University Avenue with what the panel observed to be a confusing and circuitous system of ramps and tunnels, and inadequate and inconsistent wayfinding signage and a design that pre-dates the ADA do little to improve station access. The only route for pedestrians seeking to cross the railroad tracks near the transit center is through an underpass tunnel that is poorly lit, constricted, and noisy due to the four lanes of adjacent University Avenue traffic.

The transit center is served by buses that are accessed by riders at multiple points. Stanford University's Marguerite Shuttle picks up and drops off along the University Avenue loop immediately outside the southbound train platform and a few of the shuttle routes use the busway, the other bus operators (Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, SamTrans, and AC Transit) use only the busway, which is separated from the train station by a short but indirect path. (Alternatively, the direct path involves pedestrians walking

in an active bus lane.) Riders wait for buses on a shaded, open-air platform, and operations generally work well, yet bus layover space is sometimes limited. As a result, SamTrans buses often idle along the El Camino Real on- and off-ramps, which then requires a complex routing between the on-ramp and the eventual busway. The routes operate at a variety of frequencies, with VTA's Routes 22 and 522 operating every 15 minutes or better and other routes running less frequently. There is significant use of the GoPass program across the



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The station environment would benefit from an improved pedestrian experience, including improved lighting and crosswalks, and better pedestrian connectivity between transportation modes and surrounding assets.

community, with Stanford University and Hospital faculty, staff, and students comprising a majority of those pass users.

Southwest of the train station, pedestrians and bicyclists must navigate a series of ramps connecting University Avenue and El Camino Real to access the station. The panel noted that curb cuts generally fail to meet ADA standards. Cyclists must choose between biking on a four-lane roadway or using sidewalks, the latter of which are not wide enough to comfortably accommodate simultaneous pedestrian and cyclist use. The University Loop also presents an unsafe condition for cyclists who arrive at the station via the Embarcadero Bike Path. The path terminates at the station, and cyclists must choose between biking through a pinch point along a sidewalk that also serves as the southbound train platform or traveling along University Loop and navigating between the Marguerite

buses and riders. Palo Alto has a high share of home-to-school trips made in bicycles by school-aged students, a reflection of the City's commitment to the Safe Routes to School program, further increasing the bicycling traffic moving through the area, particularly in the mornings.

Northeast of the train station, pedestrians and bicyclists face similar conditions involving ramp crossings between University Avenue and Alma Street. There are no cycling accommodations along this portion of University Avenue and, while cyclists are encouraged to walk their bicycles through the underground tunnel, many opt to ride on the sidewalk, creating an unsafe environment for pedestrians. Without adequate sidewalks closer to the station, pedestrians using Alma Street to access the station must walk through the surrounding parking lots and use inconvenient crossings at the far end of the platform.



The panel's observations of the existing station design, mobility, and wayfinding elements noted several areas that would benefit from updates. Near-term recommendations focus on improving the station experience for all users.

Near-Term Recommendations

Prioritize clean and safe improvements. Any improvements to the station should first focus on the safety and comfort of pedestrians and cyclists using the PATC. At a minimum, pedestrian crossings should be made ADA-compliant with accessible curb cuts and detectable warning strips. Lighting is foundational to safety, and addressing the inadequately lit areas, such as the pathways southwest of the busway and along the tunnels and ramps, should be prioritized. The sponsor team may also consider using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) certified professionals to audit the current station experience and make additional physical improvements to the station that will enhance personal safety. It is the panel's observation that cleanliness is a persistent challenge, particularly along the train station's tunnels and ramps, and one that detracts from users' perceptions of safety. Addressing the cleanliness and ongoing maintenance of the station environment will support a safer and more pleasant user experience. The addition of public art around the station can also add to the overall welcoming nature of the area, improve perceptions of safety, and provide an opportunity to showcase work created or curated by the University as well as local and regional artists.

Improve wayfinding in and around the station. Wayfinding signage improvements are encouraged to better facilitate navigation to and around the station and achieve consistency in terms of font, phrasing, and placement. An agency should be engaged to create a new wayfinding campaign for the PATC to improve station area navigation and create a more recognizable look and feel for transit in the area. The campaign could also expand beyond the transit center and into its immediate surroundings for broader consistency and brand recognition. Electronic signage indicating the arrival of the next train or bus could alert riders to station amenities, help them feel more confident in the service's reliability, and reduce potential rider uncertainty while waiting. Signage should alert users to dual-purpose (bike and pedestrian) paths while also providing navigation assistance and highlighting key destinations. The panel believes that the Metropolitan Planning Commission's regional wayfinding project at the PATC represents a good opportunity to highlight Palo Alto's unique history, and the City should consider extending the pilot project to include other neighborhoods around town.

Incentivize garage usage. Changes to parking policies in downtown Palo Alto can help improve traffic flow and safety at and around the PATC. Although there are two parking garages

with ample capacity within walking distance of the PATC, drivers often compete for limited on-street parking. Improved wayfinding signage can help direct drivers to the garages and encourage their use. Instituting even a nominal charge for on-street parking could further encourage garage use. More active enforcement of existing parking ordinances can help reduce on-street parking problems, which often include double parking, misuse of ADA spaces, and parking in No Parking areas. The panel also recommends that the City direct developers to use these existing garages, thereby allowing developers to include those excess spaces in their efforts to meet parking requirements for new projects.

Additional short-term improvements:

- Expand the use of the GoPass and BayPass programs with area employers such as those in the area around the PATC such as neighboring Stanford Shopping Center to further encourage nonvehicular travel.
- The City could also look at participating in a regional bike and/or scooter-share program to support first- and last-mile connectivity. (Changes to the bike network should be consistent with the City's forthcoming 2026 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan Update and, if possible, address any gaps in the Plan.)
- Improved bus service, featuring greater frequency and new connections, would also encourage residents to leave their cars at home.

Medium- and Long-Term Recommendations

The panel considered how the design of the busway and broader station area could be improved to address the challenges that transit riders and bus drivers face in accessing the transit center. The following design recommendations are conceptual and would require a more thorough engineering study to better identify and further explore the potential benefits and trade-offs.

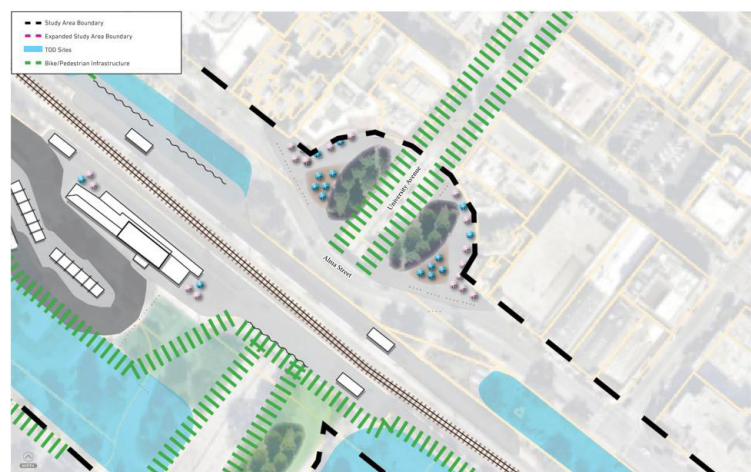
Improve the busway to accommodate more buses. The current busway can accommodate 10 buses, which the panel believes is no longer adequate for the station. With a relocation of the MacArthur Park restaurant, the panel's proposed busway design could enable the addition of six more berths and additional space around the busway perimeter



Busway and adjacent parcel modifications can better accommodate buses at the PATC while still facilitating access to the potential development site.



University Loop and Palm Drive would be modified to better protect bicyclists.



The elimination of the on- and off-ramps at Alma Street will greatly improve pedestrian safety in the area.

for bus layover. It is anticipated that these additions would accommodate the following logistical adjustments:

- VTA's planned frequency increases on Routes 22 and 522 and any other future route frequency improvements;
- The relocation of Stanford University's Margurite shuttle into the busway to facilitate greater station efficiency and have a single location in the transit center for all bus routes; and
- The inclusion of SamTrans routes within the busway to avoid excess time traveling between the station and the existing layover along El Camino Real.

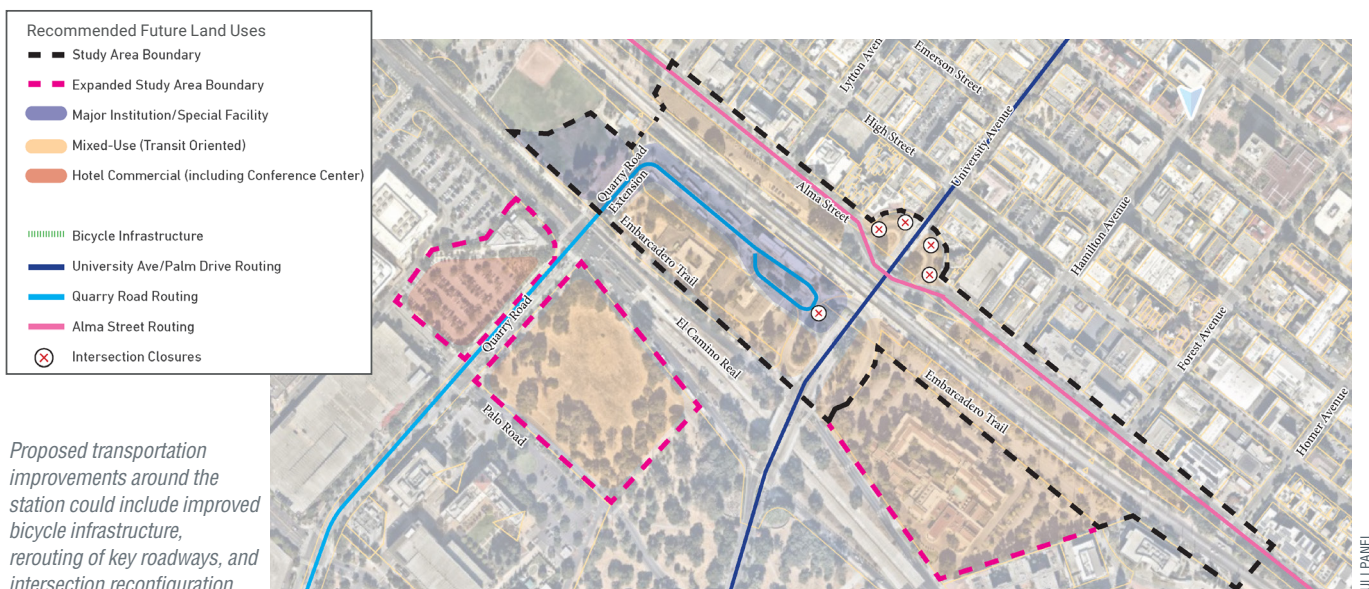
This design moves the point of entry and exit for buses to the northwest, leveraging the planned connection to Quarry Road. The design also moves the Marguerite shuttle boarding location to the busway and closes University Loop to traffic, except for access to and parking for the development parcel to the southwest of the busway. These shifts will also facilitate the connection of Embarcadero Shared Use Path to the station and the potential development parcel.

Modify University Avenue and Palm Drive to protect bicyclists. Changes are also envisioned by the panel for University Avenue and Palm Drive. By reducing each road to a single lane of traffic in each direction and installing protected bike lanes, connections can be made to the shared-use path along Palm Drive. To accommodate an entrance to the southwestern development parcel, the panel recommends shifting the bike lane and adding a right-turn lane along

University Avenue headed southwest and adding a left-turn pocket for those moving northeast. For vehicles exiting the development, the design would permit right turns only, and drivers wishing to travel east on University Avenue would use a U-turn at the next intersection.

Remove the ramps at Alma Street. The panel's final recommended modification to the street network calls for the elimination of the cloverleaf on- and off-ramps connecting University Avenue and Alma Street. This change would create a single continuous block between El Camino Real and High Street, dramatically improving pedestrian safety through the area. The change would also create space for community gathering and programming near the station and close to downtown. For cyclists, the elimination of the ramps to and from Alma Street further supports the proposed changes to and associated bike lanes for University Avenue. Under the overpass, the bike lanes could either be continued through protected space on the street or shifted to the current pedestrian path, made into a larger multiuse path by widening the tunnel if feasible.

Adjust on-street parking to create protected bike lanes. The panel also considered how the improved bicycling infrastructure around the transit center could continue into the surrounding street network, which would encourage and facilitate more bike trips over vehicular usage. University Avenue continues into downtown Palo Alto, where on-street parking could shift from its current angled configuration to a parallel orientation. This shift would free space on the street to create parking-protected bike lanes as far east as Webster Street.





Funding and Finance

THE TRANSFORMATIONS POSED BY THE PANEL AND ENVISIONED BY VARIOUS PARTNERS will require significant funding. Both federal and state funding sources will be needed to help fund or finance new housing near transit, for instance, particularly in those projects spurred along by SB 79.

It is the panel's understanding that eight of the largest counties in California will be responding to SB 79 with zoning changes, which will take time to enact. Those same counties will expect that those zoning changes will produce the needed housing. However, the underlying difficulties with new housing production are not just related to zoning. Finding the funds to support the development ahead will be a key challenge for all communities impacted. High interest rates, rising construction costs, and labor shortages will all contribute to the difficulties developers and jurisdictions will experience moving even fully entitled projects forward.

It is the panel's observation that state and federal funds administered by the California State Transportation Agency will be needed to meet the funding and financing gaps that typically prevent projects from moving forward, and the panel believes that the State of California is working with jurisdictions, metropolitan planning organizations, and transit agencies to help use these funds.

Explore federal funding and financing sources. The following federal funding sources, some of which are unique to California, may prove helpful in advancing TOD around the transit center. Most approaches will start with joint

development, funded by flexing money from the Surface Transportation Block Grant program or the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) into one of the following programs:

- The [Urbanized Area Formula Grant](#) program (Section 5307) makes federal resources available to governors and other recipients for transit capital and operating assistance and transportation-related planning in urbanized areas.
- The [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality](#) (CMAQ) Improvement Program provides flexible funding to state and local governments for transportation projects and programs to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act.
- NHPP funds can be used in California to [mitigate impacts from highway capacity increases](#) under CEQA, by funding housing near transit.
- California can fund housing near transit as a transportation control measure in nonattainment areas, if the project is not already in the transportation improvement program baseline.
- The [Transportation Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act](#) (TIFIA) and the [Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing](#) (RRIF) are below-market financing mechanisms with several favorable features, typically used to finance transportation infrastructure that may also be used for joint development.

Consider State of California funding sources. The following funding may be available to support housing and other transit-oriented development around the transit center.

Housing and transportation focused funding includes the following:

- The Metropolitan Transportation Commission's [Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing](#) (TOAH) financing supports the production and preservation of affordable housing near high-quality transit.
- The [Infill Infrastructure Grant](#) (IIG) program seeks to promote infill housing development by providing financial assistance for projects that are an integral part of or necessary to facilitate the development of affordable and mixed-income housing.

- California's [Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities](#) (AHSC) program funds projects that implement land use, housing, and transportation practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Transportation focused funding includes the following:

- The [Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program](#) (TIRCP) provides grants from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund for transformative capital improvements that will modernize California's intercity, commuter, and urban rail systems, and bus and ferry transit systems, to significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, vehicle miles traveled, and congestion.
- The [Zero-Emission Transit Capital Program](#) provides funds for zero-emission transit equipment, including zero-emission vehicles and refueling infrastructure. Funds may also be used to fund transit operating expenditures that prevent service reduction or elimination.
- The [Low Carbon Transit Operations Program](#) (LCTOP) is a Caltrans program that provides operating and capital assistance for transit agencies to reduce GHG emissions and improve mobility, with a priority on serving disadvantaged communities.
- The [Clean Mobility Options](#) program funds zero-emission transportation services such as bike and scooter sharing, electric carsharing and carpooling, on-demand shuttles using electric vans or buses, and fixed-route and traditional transit services, including school buses.
- The [Sustainable Transportation Equity Project](#) funds community-driven planning, clean transportation, and supports projects that increase transportation equity by addressing residents' transportation needs, increasing residents' access to key destinations, and reducing GHG emissions.

Federal Funding and Financing Sources: Eligible Joint Development Activities

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) outlines potential capital costs associated with joint development activities that are eligible for FTA assistance. Some of these activities must be associated with a project that has been identified through the transportation planning process. Common eligible capital

cost may include the following, with the panel calling particular attention to the items in **bold**:

- **Project-specific property acquisition and associated relocation costs, as needed**
- Demolition of existing structures
- **Site preparation**
- **Utilities, including utility relocation and construction**
- **Building foundations, including substructure improvements for buildings constructed over transit facilities**
- Walkways, including bicycle lanes, pedestrian connections, and access links between public transportation services and related development
- Pedestrian and bicycle access to a public transportation facility
- Construction, renovation, and improvement of intercity bus and intercity rail stations and terminals
- Renovation and improvement of historic transportation facilities
- **Open space, including site amenities and related streetscape improvements such as functional landscaping and streetscaping**
- Safety and security equipment and facilities (including lighting, surveillance, and related intelligent transportation system applications)
- **Facilities that incorporate community services such as daycare and health care**
- A capital project for, and improving, equipment or a facility for an intermodal transfer facility or transportation mall
- **Construction of space for commercial uses**
- Capital project and equipment for an intermodal transfer facility or transportation mall, including acquisition of facilities and equipment, roadbeds, tracks and bus ramps, pedestrian concourses, parking facilities, park-and-ride services, improvements to existing bus or rail transit terminals, stations, major transfer points, and shelters as well as other facilities directly related to the linking of public transportation facilities with other modes of transportation
- Transportation-related furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE)
- Parking improvements with a public transportation justification and use, or with an intercity bus or intercity rail justification and use, in connection with joint development
- Project development activities, including design, engineering, construction cost estimating, environmental analysis, real estate packaging and financial projections (operating income and expenses, debt service, and cash flow analysis), and negotiations to secure financing and tenants
- Professional services, including reasonable and necessary costs incurred to hire professionals to prepare or perform the activities described above, or to assist the project sponsor in reviewing the same

The panel believes that this broad eligibility can result in dynamic, mixed-use spaces with retail or community services, all closely connected to existing or planned transit facilities, in addition to the revenue- and cost-sharing arrangements beneficial to transit agencies. ([Federal Transit Administration](#))



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Governance and Implementation

THERE IS A GENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM THE TRANSIT CENTER into a more welcoming gateway and functional transportation hub. With the range of public sector and institutional entities involved, the panel believes that an effective working partnership will be critical, particularly relating to the involvement of and leadership from the University, the City, and VTA. Working together, these partners and more can realize a new vision for the study area and create a framework that will support the ongoing successful operation of the facility and its services while supporting the development of additional housing and amenities on the surrounding parcels. The panel also believes that with careful planning, this transformational work can also leverage the increasing land value from the housing development, enhance local and regional transportation connectivity, and support community vibrancy. Through collaborative, meaningful involvement, lasting commitment, and shared leadership, the PATC can become a model for transit-oriented development for the region.

With Stanford University, the City of Palo Alto, and VTA coming together for this study, these primary partners have established an important foundation and expressed keen interest in leveraging the site for additional transit-oriented development, with the goals of providing needed housing, additional community connectivity, and boosting the economic vitality of the area. However, in order to maximize potential land use, add housing, and improve multimodal

connectivity, interagency agreement and coordination enhancements are needed.

Blending shared use of a facility is often challenging. In this instance, the operations and ownership of the PATC and its immediate surroundings are represented by partners who share a common vision but who have varying responsibilities. In the interest of further solidifying the various roles and responsibilities of the primary partners,

appropriate representation from Caltrain as a property owner and Santa Clara County as the land use authority for parcels immediately adjacent to the study area should be added to the partner team. The panel recommends that the County, in particular, be briefed on the findings and recommendations from this study during the first half of 2026, which can support further momentum around the PATC transformation.

The panel also recommends that formalized agreements be put in place to help guide future implementation measures. A nonbinding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can help partners memorialize their commitment to further collaboration and outline shared goals and objectives. If appropriate, a more formal Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) could be considered to allow the public agencies to exercise common powers going forward as it relates to the PATC. This could take the form of an operating agreement.

The panel notes that progress in the public realm is typically made through careful and incremental steps. Through a partnership arrangement, the entities identified in this report can memorialize their intentions and commitment to the structure that will pursue the objectives and advance the shared goals to the benefit of the PATC and the surrounding community.

Short-Term Recommendations

Address early, foundational governance needs. The collaboration that will be required to meaningfully transform the transit center and develop TOD in the surrounding environment will require a formalized partnership framework and governance structure.

- Convene primary partners, including representatives from Santa Clara County, to debrief the ULI recommendations by the first half of 2026.
- Immediately following, consider more formalized agreements among public-sector partners and the University to continue development and activation at the PATC and adjacent parcels.

Make necessary land use and zoning modifications. The zoning changes proposed by the panel will need to be addressed in 2026 to lay the foundation for the remaining improvements recommended for the area.

- Evaluate the effects of SB 79 at the PATC and adjacent parcels. This could include an SB 79 alternate plan to shift density into a new Gateway District overlay zone.
- Evaluate the potential for increases in land-value for existing landowners of the surrounding parcels if TOD development at the PATC is pursued.
- Evaluate potential benefits associated with these increases for existing landowners, which could produce mutually beneficial development partnerships.
- Align land-value capture policies to fund infrastructure, housing, or other City priorities.
- Update the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan to align with the Gateway District overlay zone.
- Codify the Gateway District overlay zone with land-value capture policy.

Work with landowners and the City to pave the way for new development. While VTA continues to lease and manage the train station, the following actions are recommended for the surrounding land.

- Property owners should evaluate existing leaseholds for potential redevelopment sites and develop a plan for future leases that are consistent with plans for development at and immediately around the station as they are formed
- Landowners and zoning officials should engage in conversations about redevelopment and housing development in the Gateway District.

Begin funding pursuits. Work to secure funding for the improvements proposed by the panel soon.

- Pursue early conversations and coordination with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.
- Develop a potential slate of funding options, including the opportunity to use TOD housing as a highway mitigation measure to unlock associated funding.
- Consult with the California State Transportation Agency on flex funding from transportation to housing. (This type of action will require regional Federal Highway Administration approval and may therefore take longer to navigate. Launching conversations in the short term will provide ample time to work through the process.)

Across the United States, there are several good examples of transit stations that embody many of the best practices in transit-oriented development and station management recommended by the panel. In particular, the panel notes that the three West Coast stations outlined below could provide PATC partners with inspiration for integrating mobilities, incorporating housing resources, and working with key partners.

Case Study: Sound Transit, University of Washington Station

Located at one of the busiest intersections in Seattle, Washington, the University of Washington Station brings together multiple transportation modalities, including light rail, local and regional bus lines, a bicycle and pedestrian trail, and the nearby freeway. The station is on the University of Washington medical campus, and the station development required a partnership between the Washington State Department of Transportation, the City of Seattle Department of Transportation, the transit agencies (Sound Transit and King County Metro), and the associated utilities.



The University of Washington Sound Transit Station in Seattle, Washington, provides good connectivity across modalities.

Case Study: BART – Downtown Berkeley Station

This underground station in Berkeley, California, is close to the University of California campus and is another example of TOD. The buildings at the station serve riders as well as the surrounding community and feature shops, restaurants, theaters, and other attractions. Bike parking is available onsite, and bus shelters assist with multimodal connections at the plaza level.



The Downtown Berkeley Station BART.

Case Study: Sound Transit, Lynnwood City Center Station

This Lynnwood, Washington, station near Seattle is a large transit hub that connects users with Sound Transit's light rail system, Community Transit, Swift Orange Line bus rapid transit, and Sound Transit Express buses. The park-and-ride station features a garage with over 1,600 parking spaces and facilities for bicyclists.

Noted as part of a regional growth center by the Puget Sound Regional Council, the height limits for buildings around the station were raised, and, in 2024, Housing Hope submitted plans for TOD at the site. Two new buildings at the station will provide over 160 affordable housing units, a medical clinic, and a community center, among other spaces.



The Sound Transit Lynnwood Station, in Lynnwood, Washington, provides park-and-ride garage parking as well as facilities for bicyclists.



Conclusion

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS CRITICAL...

The panel strongly encourages the sponsors to continue the collaborative process launched and strengthened through this study by articulating their collective goals for the transit center and surrounding area. The transformation processes should be clear and transparent, with each partner organization understanding exactly where and how they should be contributing to the effort. Alignment and an ongoing commitment across agencies and a collaborative, partnership mentality will be foundational to the work ahead.

There will be changes required to zoning, which will need to be addressed in the very short term. Working together, the partners should also identify the additional short- and long-term actions each entity will manage going forward.

Study area development, as recommended by the panel, should include a mix of uses and densities that leverage the opportunities of SB 79 while respecting the surrounding lower-density environment. With careful planning, new development can enhance City revenues, support housing affordability, increase access to transit, and better meet the daily needs of commuters and community members.

More broadly, changes in the infrastructure surrounding the station will be required. Improvements to roadway access for

buses and other vehicles will support better circulation and improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. In the longer term, shifting bus access north to connect to Quarry Road will also greatly improve circulation, safety, and wayfinding for those riding transit.

The transit center has a long history of service to the community. As transportation innovations have improved how people move around the region, the station has likewise adapted and improved to better serve transit riders and the surrounding community. Supported by the measures included in SB 79 and a team of partners committed to the future of the transit center, this is a unique and uniquely exciting time for the PATC and the development potential it holds. Now is the time to act.

Appendix A: Implementation Guide

Below is a high-level overview of the recommendations included within this report. For more information, please see the associated report sections.

Short Term

Transportation and Mobility

Pedestrians and Bicycles

- Bring crossings to ADA standards.
- Ensure bike network changes are consistent with the forthcoming 2026 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan Update.
- Evaluate shared mobility program (e.g., bikes and scooters).

Facility Amenities

- Add lighting in strategic locations.
- Explore Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.
- Add public art.
- Invest in electric signage.
- Pursue comprehensive wayfinding.
- Ensure cleanliness through regularly scheduled maintenance.

Transit

- Begin work on bus bay configuration, route alignments, and transfer improvements.
- Expand the GoPass and BayPass programs to area employers.
- Increase bus service and frequency.

Parking

- Encourage use of downtown parking garages.
- Improve signage and wayfinding.

- Consider a nominal on-street parking charge to encourage garage use.
- Enforce street parking regulations.
- Establish a policy to allow new development parking requirements to be met through existing garage capacities.

Land Use and Zoning

- Evaluate the impacts of SB 79 at the PATC and on adjacent parcels. This will likely include shifting density into a new Gateway District overlay zone and then submitting the SB 79 alternate plan to the State.
- Evaluate the potential for increases in land-value for existing landowners of the surrounding parcels if TOD development at the PATC is pursued.
- Evaluate potential benefits associated with these increases for existing landowners, which could produce mutually beneficial development partnerships.
- Align land-value capture policies to fund infrastructure, housing, or other City priorities.
- Update the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan to align with the Gateway District overlay zone.
- Codify the Gateway District overlay zone with a land value capture policy.

Governance

- Convene primary partners, including representatives from Santa Clara County, to debrief the ULI panel recommendations by the first half of 2026.
- Consider more formalized agreements among public-sector partners and the University to continue development and activation at the PATC and adjacent parcels.

Development

- Work with landowners and the City to pave the way for new development.
- Property owners should clear existing leaseholds for potential study area redevelopment sites.
- Landowners and zoning officials should engage in conversations about redevelopment and housing development in the Gateway District.

Funding and Finance

- Begin work to secure funding as soon as possible.
- Pursue early conversations and coordination with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.
- Develop a potential slate of funding options, including the opportunity to use TOD housing as a highway mitigation measure to unlock associated funding.
- Consult with the California State Transportation Agency on flex funding from transportation to housing.

Medium to Long Term

Transportation and Mobility

- Improve the busway to accommodate more buses through an expanded design with greater connectivity to the station.
- Modify University Avenue and Palm Drive to protect bicyclists by reducing each road to a single lane of traffic in each direction and installing protected bike lanes.

- Remove the ramps at Alma Street to create a single continuous block between El Camino Real and High Street, dramatically improving pedestrian safety through the area.
- Create space for community gathering and programming near the station and close to downtown where the ramps have been closed.
- Adjust on-street parking on University Avenue to create protected bike lanes.

Development

- Property owners continue actions to clear existing leaseholds for redevelopment sites. VTA continues to lease and manage the train station and associated uses.
- Landowners and zoning officials continue to engage in conversations about redevelopment and development for housing in the broader Gateway District.
- Development of key parcels begins to fulfill the PATC vision as a gateway and a mixed-use transit-oriented development area with a strong focus on housing to meet SB 79 housing density requirements.

Appendix B: Key Partners Overview

To better understand the roles of each partner and their use of the PATC, the panel produced the following table. The panel recommends that further refining this table, or undergoing a similar exercise, could be useful in outlining future partnerships and communicating responsibilities to the community.

Stanford University

Land Ownership

- Land on which the PATC is located, including parcels adjacent to the Caltrain tracks
- El Camino Park, Stanford Shopping Center, MacArthur Park Restaurant, Sheraton Hotel, and 400 Mitchell Lane

Transit Role

- Operates the Marguerite Shuttle, a free public shuttle connecting the transit center to the Stanford University main campus, medical center, and research park
- Provides GoPass for free Caltrain access to eligible Stanford affiliates
- Provides VTA and AC Transit bus passes to eligible Stanford affiliates

Development Authority

- Subject to a General Use Permit from Santa Clara County for property not within Palo Alto city limits
- Leases some parcels for non-university uses (e.g., hotel, restaurant, bus depot)

Housing Contribution

- Built over 2,220 housing units in Palo Alto, contributing 35 percent of citywide housing production over the last 20 years

City of Palo Alto

Jurisdiction

- Manages infrastructure, utilities, and public services on the city side of the railroad tracks
- Responsible for planning, zoning, and permitting within city limits

Transit Role

- Provides a BayPass to City employees for free access to public transit on over 27 Bay Area public transit agencies, including Caltrain and VTA.
- Operates Palo Alto Link rideshare and manages bike parking and pedestrian infrastructure

Planning and Investment

- Streetscape improvements and 2023–2031 Housing Element updates
- Owns several surface parking lots identified as housing opportunity sites in the 2023–2031 Housing Element

Transit Center Coordination

- Partner in ULI Advisory Services engagement to reimagine the transit center
- Coordinates with Stanford University and VTA on the Quarry Road Transit Connection project and other improvements

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA)

Transit Role

- Operates Routes 21, 22, and 522 at PATC
- Manages the bus transfer plaza with 10 bus bays
- Maintains the transit mall and coordinates with other agencies

Planning Authority

- Acts as Congestion Management Agency for Santa Clara County
- Promotes TOD and multimodal infrastructure

Caltrain / Joint Powers Board

Rail Ownership

- Owns and operates the Caltrain platform and tracks
- Responsible for station access, electrification, and grade separation coordination

Transit Role

- Provides regional rail service with 92 trains per day at PATC
- Recently completed Caltrain electrification project

Other Transit Agencies

- SamTrans (San Mateo County) – Operates Routes ECR, 280, 281, 296 OWL at PATC
- Dumbarton Express (AC Transit) – Provides transbay service between Union City BART and Palo Alto
- Bike Hub/Palo Alto Bikes – Manages bike storage facility at the former baggage building

Appendix C: Transit-Supportive Development Policy Recommendations

The panel outlined a series of general policies that can support ridership, safety, and more efficient mobility in and around a transit center. The policies address parking and trip reduction, vehicular access and circulation, service and delivery access, and shared and short-term mobility. In each of these categories, the policies are divided further, described in more detail, and accompanied by a rationale to assist with the messaging of the changes.

The success of these policies can be measured by first establishing a baseline for each of the following measures and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) for each: private-vehicle trip generation, including early reductions and then ongoing maintenance of low figures going forward; transit and non-auto mode usage, as indicated by increases in and consistent high usage going forward; and transit reliability, as based on the maintenance of or improvement in on-time performance of transit vehicles accessing the transit center.

Residential Parking and Trip Reduction		
Policy Element	Description	Rationale
Long-term residential parking	No private, long-term parking spaces are provided for residential units that share the transit center site. This includes both surface and structured parking dedicated to residents' personal vehicles. Exceptions may be made for other properties in the zone not directly adjacent to the transit center.	Directly supports the goal of a transit-oriented, car-free or car-lite lifestyle, maximizing the use of the transit center's location
Unbundling of parking	When parking is provided, it is charged separately. Units are marketed emphasizing a transit and shared-mobility lifestyle.	Reinforces policies that parking is not an assumed amenity for residents
Residential trip reduction measures	Required: Provide comprehensive mobility benefits for all residents, such as free or deeply discounted passes, robust on-site bicycle storage and repair facilities, and credits for car-share or ride-share services.	Mitigation for limited on-site parking and a functional mechanism to achieve low-trip generation rates

Vehicular Access and Circulation Priority		
Policy Element	Description	Rationale
Transit vehicle access priority	Transit vehicles accessing the property have superior priority over all other non-emergency vehicles entering or exiting the site onto nearby streets. Access design uses dedicated turn lanes, optimized signal phasing, and clearly marked, hardened access points to ensure reliable and swift transit movement.	Direct implementation of the core principle and essential for the functionality of the transit center
Pedestrian and bicycle priority	Access routes for all service, delivery, and short-term vehicles are designed to give superior priority to pedestrians and bicycles. This includes separated, continuous, and highly visible pedestrian and bike paths, elevated crossings at vehicle intersections, and reduced speed zones (5 mph maximum) for all vehicles on-site.	Ensures safety and encourages the most sustainable modes of transportation, mitigating potential conflicts with necessary vehicular access

Essential Service and Delivery Access

Policy Element	Description	Rationale
Designated service area	A clearly demarcated and easily accessible service area is provided to accommodate essential functions, such as trash and recycling collection, mail and package delivery, and maintenance vehicles.	Ensures operational necessities are met
Loading zones and staging	A sufficient number of dedicated, time-limited loading zones are provided for package and food delivery, accessible via the service route but located close to residential entry points. These areas are strictly limited to delivery and service functions.	Addresses the increase in last-mile delivery services while maintaining control over vehicle presence
Utility and emergency access	Continuous, unencumbered access is maintained for emergency vehicles (fire, police, ambulance) and utility maintenance vehicles, in accordance with all local codes.	Safety and regulatory compliance

Shared and Short-Term Mobility

Policy Element	Description	Rationale
Short-term and visitor parking	A limited number of short-term (e.g., two-hour maximum) visitor parking spaces are provided, clearly signed, and enforced. These spaces are not convertible to long-term residential use.	A necessary, minor allowance for visitors who may not be able to arrive by transit
Shared mobility (car-share)	Dedicated, highly visible, and conveniently located parking stalls are provided for shared mobility services (e.g., Zipcar, Gig Car Share). The number of stalls is determined based on projected utilization and regional best practices for car-lite developments.	Provides a key replacement for private car ownership and supports the car-lite policy
Ride-share accommodation	A safe, dedicated, and clearly signed pick-up and drop-off (PUDO) zone is established, located off the main transit access route and designed to accommodate app-based ride-share vehicles without impeding through-traffic or transit movements.	Acknowledges the reality of modern mobility and manages the related vehicle traffic efficiently

About the Panel

Brad Power

Panel Chair
Englewood, Colorado

Brad Power has over 30 years of experience in redevelopment, public/private real estate development partnerships, economic development, and municipal agency executive leadership. He serves as director of community development for the City of Englewood, Colorado. Englewood is adjacent to Denver, and the 22-person department coordinates the city's planning, building services, code compliance, economic development, redevelopment, and housing rehabilitation programs. A significant portion of his career included serving as executive director of the Boulder Urban Renewal Authority and redevelopment director for the City of Boulder, Colorado. He also served as the director of the Economic Development Department for the City of Longmont, Colorado. Power has facilitated over \$2 billion of private real estate capital investment for major retail center transformations as well as hotel, residential, hospital, and mixed-use developments.

Power is an active member and leader of the Urban Land Institute, where he also serves as a Trustee and formerly served as a Global Governing Trustee. He is an original member of the ULI Public/Private Partnership Council and served a three-year term as chairman of the council. Power serves as a ULI Counselor, participated as a member on several ULI committees and task forces, helped develop the UrbanPlan for Public Officials program, and has served on a jury for the ULI Hines graduate student real estate competition. He is also a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Power earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Colorado. His graduate degree is in urban and regional planning. Power was awarded the Fannie Mae Fellowship and completed the Harvard Kennedy School's Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program at Harvard University.

Robert Guptill

Boston, Massachusetts

Robert Guptill is a director of transit and rail planning at VHB and the former director of service planning at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), where he spent over eight years working on a wide range of issues, including bus stop and station design, diversion planning, scheduling, and resource allocation. Guptill oversaw routing and scheduling changes through financial constraints, political dictates, vehicle shortages, worsening traffic congestion, and a lack of bus operators, and managed his staff's participation in the MBTA's bus network redesign. Through his many years of experience in the public sector, Guptill regularly worked as part of a collaborative team to address complex issues and make transit service more efficient. Now at VHB, Guptill provides his operational, design, and analytical skills to transit and roadway projects across the VHB footprint.

Aaron Kowalski

Indianapolis, Indiana

Aaron Kowalski, AICP, is a certified urban planner and transit-oriented development subject-matter expert with more than 15 years of professional experience. As an associate principal at MKSK, a national, employee-owned planning, urban design, and landscape architecture firm with 12 metropolitan offices across the Midwest and Southeast, Kowalski leads complex, multijurisdictional planning and implementation efforts at the intersection of infrastructure, land use, and economic development.

Since 2018, Kowalski has been instrumental in advancing the expansion of the South Shore Commuter Rail System, connecting Northwest Indiana to Chicago—the world’s ninth-largest economy. Serving as a lead consultant to the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) and the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, he has helped establish 11 Transit Development Districts to incentivize and unlock TOD investment. He also led the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) pilot planning grant for Northwest Indiana, catalyzing over \$500 million in private real estate development around new and existing transit stations.

Kowalski currently advises the RDA in developing its 20-year regional strategic plan, which includes further transit expansion, TOD implementation, the creation of a new RDA land development nonprofit, and targeted redevelopment initiatives in the city of Gary focused on downtown revitalization and blight elimination.

Beyond Northwest Indiana, Kowalski has supported the City of Knoxville through an FTA-funded Transit-Supported Development Study, identifying TOD opportunities at 12 key sites connected to the University of Tennessee’s flagship campus. He also serves as a long-term advisor to the City of Indianapolis, leading efforts related to bus rapid transit corridors, the downtown core, and the emerging framework for trail-oriented development across the city.

Andrew S. Malick

San Diego, California

Andrew Malick is a seasoned real estate developer with more than 25 years of experience. He has experience delivering complex projects across both public/private partnerships and the private sector. His forward-thinking approach integrates innovative policy and construction methods to create sustainable, accessible, and community-focused developments.

Malick specializes in the revitalization of transit centers, balancing ambitious development goals with meaningful public engagement and practical implementation. He is currently breaking ground on a 500-unit, rent-restricted multifamily community on transit agency-owned land—a landmark project that required securing \$27 million in state grants to fund deficient infrastructure. In the private sector, his recent work includes a Bus Rapid Transit-adjacent, 100-unit project in San Diego County featuring an exceptionally low parking ratio, advancing truly transit-centered living. He also led the renewal of National City’s main street through a 127-unit housing development rooted in community revitalization.

As a champion of streamlined development, Malick has played a pivotal role in shaping TOD policy in California. He was the first developer to utilize the Senate Bill 375 exemption in the City of San Diego, expediting approvals for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He also helped to author Assembly Bill 2372, which fosters moderate-income housing along transit corridors. His commitment to efficiency extends to construction practices, where he has successfully employed prefabricated elements and alternative building code methods to accelerate delivery.

Beyond his development work, Malick is a recognized industry leader. He frequently speaks on housing policy, most recently at the National APTA Rail Conference, and has guest lectured at several universities. He serves on the Board of the Council of Infill Builders and is a past leader of the ULI San Diego–Tijuana District Council, where he founded the Transit Oriented Development Council.

Barton (Bart) G. Treece III

Seattle, Washington

Bart Treece is the director of the interdisciplinary Mobility Innovation Center at the University of Washington, a role he has held since January 2022. In this capacity, he develops and delivers near-term applied research projects that address both existing and emerging transportation challenges. Treece works closely with stakeholders across the public, private, and academic sectors to identify opportunities where university expertise can support pilot projects, policy development, and evaluation efforts. He coordinates the Center's activities with regional transportation agencies, civic leaders, and technology industry partners to ensure that outcomes provide meaningful benefits to all parties involved.

Treece played a key role in co-founding the Seattle Climate Innovation Hub, a collaborative initiative focused on accelerating climate solutions through cross-sector partnerships. His recent work includes projects that evaluate site redevelopment opportunities with transit agencies and utilities for electrified or "e-mobility" infrastructure and explored the use of public/private partnerships for bus base electrification. He is also a trusted advisor to university-based startups and early-stage entrepreneurs, helping to guide the commercialization and deployment of transportation technologies that address real-world challenges.

With over a decade of experience at the Washington State Department of Transportation, Treece supported a wide range of initiatives spanning project development, design, construction, operations, maintenance, and emergency response. Earlier in his career, he worked as a broadcast journalist in the Austin, Phoenix, and Seattle media markets.

Treece serves on the boards of directors for Commute Seattle and the Intelligent Transportation Society of Washington. He earned his bachelor of science in justice studies from Arizona State University, his master of sustainable transportation from the University of Washington, and is also a certified Professional Transportation Planner.

Harriet Tregoning

Washington, D.C.

Harriet Tregoning is senior advisor on land use in the Office of the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Transportation. She is the founding director of [NUMO](#), the New Urban Mobility alliance housed at the World Resources Institute, a collaborative effort aimed at ensuring that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds have the greatest possible impact on the health and prosperity of communities, increasing their affordable access, resilience, and low-carbon connections to jobs and daily needs. She currently splits her time between those two organizations.

Tregoning previously served as principal deputy assistant secretary of the Office of Community Planning and Development at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. At HUD, she initiated a \$1 billion National Disaster Resilience Competition supporting communities in building strong and resilient economies. Tregoning is former director of D.C. planning, the first secretary of planning for the State of Maryland; served on the Transportation Planning Board for the Washington Area Council of Governments, the boards of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy; and was Trustee of the Urban Land Institute.



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