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Transit-Oriented Communities

PLANNING & DESIGN PRINCIPLES

MAY 2025

UTA

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1. Introduction: Purpose of This Document

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) has developed and adopted the following Guidelines to guide and inspire stakeholders in the visioning, planning, design, and development of station areas. These concepts and principles provide a framework for Station Area Planning, master planning, and site and architectural design—ultimately supporting the creation of Transit Oriented Communities (TOC)—grounded in the core principles and best planning practices centered on integrating land use and transportation to create walkable, sustainable and connected communities around high-capacity transit stations.

These Guidelines also serve as a framework for UTA to evaluate Station Area Plans and proposed UTA-involved developments, providing informed recommendations to be considered by the Agency's Board of Trustees. These Guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive; rather, they are intended to be adapted and meaningfully interpreted in response to the specific physical and market conditions of each station area and development site.



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2. Transit-Oriented Communities: A Strategy for Growth in Utah

Utah's population growth has consistently outpaced that of most other states, and over the next 30 years, the population is projected to nearly double. Yet, the developable area in Utah's key metropolitan areas is constrained by mountains, lakes, and availability of resources. Thoughtful planning centered around Transit Oriented Communities ensures that this growth can be accommodated while preserving open space and maintaining the high quality of life that makes Utah an attractive place to live, work, and raise a family. TOC principles provide a framework for managing both population and economic growth, guiding commercial development in ways that support employment opportunities, protect air quality, expand transportation options, and provide affordable housing opportunities.

Utah's rapid growth necessitates a strategic focus on identifying and cultivating key development centers. TOCs offer a proactive response to the challenges of growth by creating high-density, mixed-use hubs that improve land use efficiency, reduce dependence on automobiles, and preserve open space. By aligning these centers with existing and planned transit infrastructure, TOCs support sustainable urban expansion while enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

TOCs promote seamless integration between land use and transportation, fostering walkable, vibrant neighborhoods with accessible amenities. This approach not only enhances daily convenience for residents but also attracts businesses, increases foot traffic, and stimulates local economic growth.

TOCs represent a critical strategy to address growth in Utah by encouraging efficient land use around existing and planned transit infrastructure, which reduces reliance on automobiles and preserves open space. TOCs will assist Utah in managing growth while maintaining the State's high quality of life.

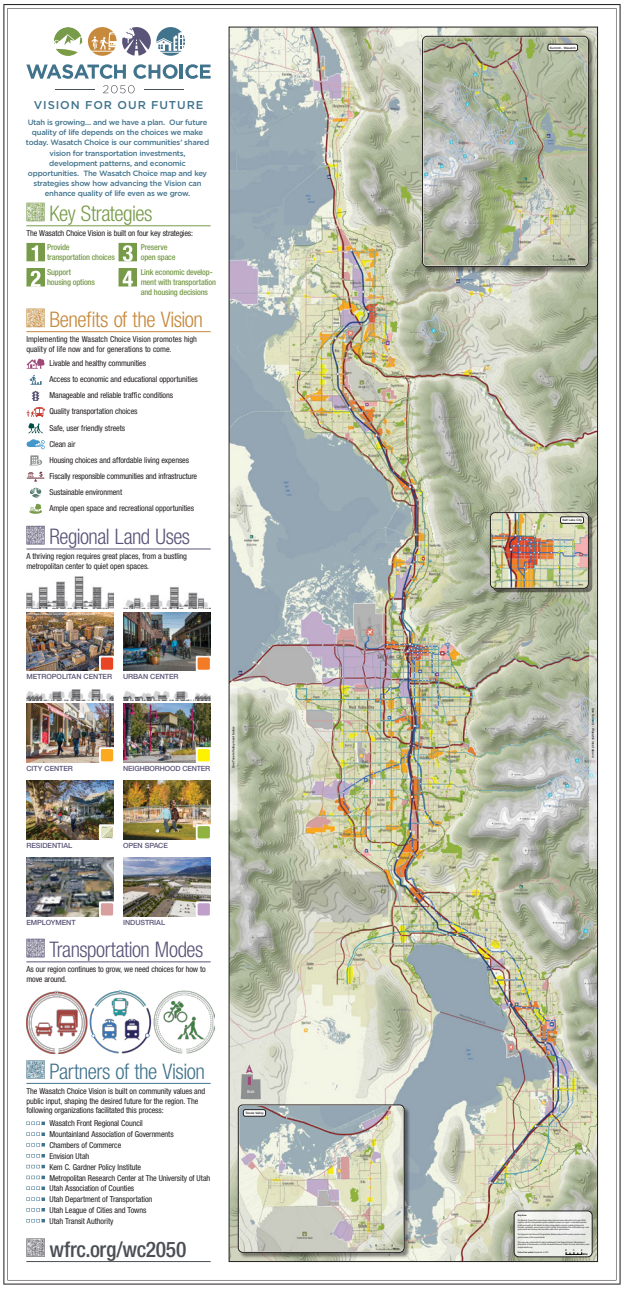


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3. Supporting the Regional Growth Vision

The Wasatch Choice Vision (Vision), the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and the UTA's Transit Oriented Communities initiatives work together to promote sustainable and effective planning consistent with the regional goals and state mandates. These guidelines uphold the core principles of the Wasatch Choice Vision, which provides a comprehensive framework integrating transportation investments, land use, and economic development to achieve key regional goals such as sustainability, accessibility, and quality of life.

As the transportation component of this vision, the RTP outlines strategies and investments across all transportation modes to advance its objectives. By ensuring transportation planning is integrated with land use and economic strategies, these initiatives foster coordinated regional development. At the local level, UTA's TOC initiatives translate these plans into action, focusing on station area development that supports both Vision and RTP. Legislative efforts by state leaders complement these efforts by encouraging housing affordability and land use planning that supports transit oriented growth. UTA prioritizes the creation of vibrant, walkable communities around transit hubs to enhance connectivity, increase ridership, and drive economic growth. By integrating these elements, TOCs address both regional and local needs, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth for all stakeholders.



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4. Why Transit-Oriented Communities Matter to UTA

UTA's approach to property development is unique due to its role as a public transit provider. Beyond the goal of generating non fare box revenue, UTA's development activities are driven by these primary objectives:

Increase Ridership: Prioritize development projects that encourage public transit use and integrate seamlessly with the transit system. For UTA, TOCs are pivotal in boosting ridership through improved transit accessibility.

Optimize Developable Land and Support Regional Growth Vision: Focus on efficient land use that aligns with the broader regional growth strategy, fostering sustainable and community-friendly developments.

Capture Value: Ensure that developments contribute to UTA's financial stability and operational sustainability.

These objectives reflect UTA's commitment to supporting state, regional, and community efforts to optimize the benefits of growth and transportation investment.



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5. Guidelines and Standards



Connectivity

Multi-modal connectivity is a critical element of successful TOCs. Auto-centric development practices have produced numerous adverse outcomes that are evident at both regional and local level, including reduced on-street activity, urban spaces lacking a sense of place, and communities where automobile use is nearly unavoidable. Such patterns can disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including youth, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. Moreover, auto-centric designs have been strongly associated with public health challenges including deteriorating air quality.

Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive, multi-modal approach. With these guidelines, UTA seeks to accommodate access to its network by various transportation modes including pedestrian, cycling, and vehicular modes to effectively serve the increasingly diverse needs of residents of the Wasatch Front.

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Pedestrian Focused Connectivity

A well-designed pedestrian experience enables and encourages people to walk to nearby amenities and transit stations. Destinations within half a mile are generally regarded within a walkable distance. Within this radius of a major transit hub, the pedestrian experience should prioritize safety, comfort, and provide an inviting and natural flow throughout the station area.

Guidelines:

- Streets should be designed to calm traffic and create a safe buffer between pedestrians and vehicles. This can be achieved through landscaping elements, including the strategic placement of street trees between sidewalks and drive aisles.
- Minimize conflict points between pedestrians, vehicles, and transit by incorporating safety measures such as curb extensions (bulb-outs) at intersections and clearly marked mid-block crossings.
- Incorporate design features that shield pedestrians from sun, wind, and precipitation. These may include vegetation, canopies, awnings, or other architectural elements that provide shelter and act as wind barriers.
- Pedestrian pathways should be direct, clearly defined, and designed for ease of use. Consistent, pedestrian-scaled wayfinding signage should be integrated throughout the site.
- Major street crossings should be signalized to ensure safe and orderly movement for all users.
- Crosswalks should be enhanced with features such as raised surfaces, contrasting materials (e.g., paving stones or stamped concrete), and high-visibility markings to improve safety, durability, and visual appeal.
- Seating should be provided along primary pedestrian walkways.
- Sidewalks should be wide enough for unimpeded movement with furniture, facilities and business street activation located outside the pedestrian zone.



Bicycle, Micromobility, and Other Active Transportation Networks

Active Transportation (AT) networks, which involve human-powered modes of travel like walking and biking, play a vital role in enhancing Transit Oriented Communities. By reducing infrastructure costs, improving accessibility and safety, and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, AT networks offer sustainable, inclusive, and affordable transportation options. They connect homes, workplaces, and transit stations, fostering regional connectivity and significantly bolstering the viability and appeal of public transit systems. Newly constructed multi-family and office building within a TOC should program facilities that encourage active transportation.

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Guidelines:

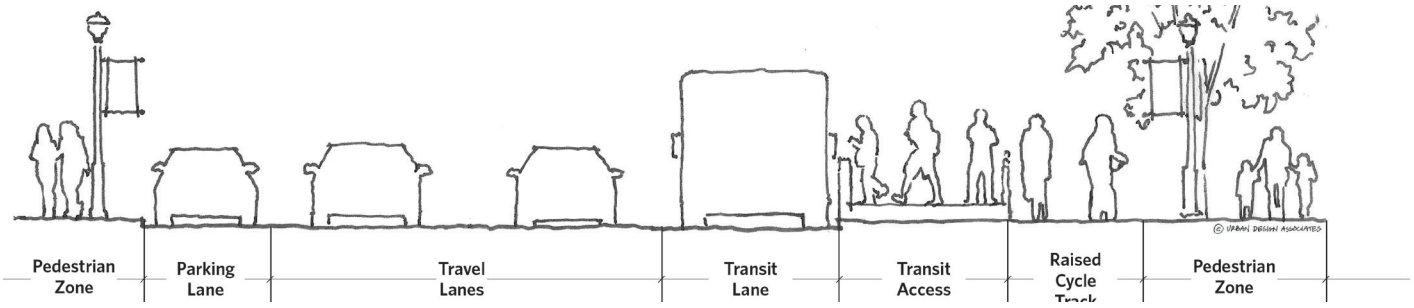
- Bicycle facilities should provide both short-term (less than 2 hours) and long-term (4+ hours) storage.
- Short-term bicycle parking must be located within 50 feet of any entrance frequented by riders.
- Bicycle facility locations should be in highly visible, adequately lit, and secure.
- Bicycle racks must support the frame and at least one wheel, enabling secure locking with a U-shaped lock.
- Designate bicycle-priority corridors that connect directly to transit stations and regional trail networks.
- Bicycle and scooter share services should be considered if offered within the community.
- Docking stations and scooter corrals must be positioned to avoid obstructing pedestrian pathways, enhancing safety and accessibility.
- Walking and biking networks must be context-driven and connected to regional pathways, ensuring seamless mobility and accessibility.
- Adherence to best practices outlined in NACTO's All Ages and Abilities Bicycle Facilities Chart and Urban Bikeway Design Guide is recommended.

Integrated Bus/Transit Infrastructure

TOCs prioritize access to public transportation, enabling seamless connectivity for residents, employees, and visitors. The accessibility of transit within a TOC is central to achieving UTA's goal of increasing ridership. By integrating bus and transit services, TOCs reduce reliance on private vehicles and facilitate efficient, multi-modal travel options. High-quality transit connectivity enhances the attractiveness to businesses and investors, decreases the need for excessive parking, and fosters economic growth through increased foot traffic and accessibility.

Guidelines:

- Any action affecting bus services must be coordinated and approved by UTA.
- Ensure direct, convenient, conflict-free pedestrian access between bus stops and rail stations.
- Design proposals should anticipate future transit network expansion and align with UTA's regional growth strategies.
- New transit facilities must anticipate both current and future system needs as defined in:
  - UTA's 5-Year Service Plan
  - UTA Long-Range Transit Plan
  - UTA Bus Stop Master Plan
- Proposed busways must safely accommodate vehicle maneuvers and meet the UTA Design Criteria Manual.
- All transit facilities must meet the specifications outlined in the UTA Design Criteria Manual, including traffic control, access, and wayfinding.



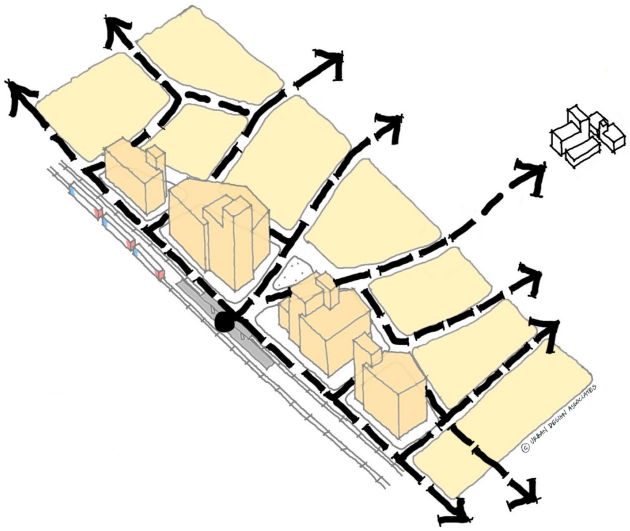
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Automobile

While TOCs prioritize pedestrians, active transportation, and transit users, they also consider automobile connectivity. Facilities such as Park and Ride (P&R) and drop-off areas accommodate the many riders who need to access transit by driving. Striking a balance between TOC priorities and automobile needs ensures functional, inclusive communities that support businesses, facilitate deliveries, and maintain access for emergency services, all within the framework of vibrant and well-connected urban spaces.

Guidelines:

- Streets should be configured in a grid-like system to promote multiple direct paths to destinations within the site.
- Blocks should be no longer than 250'–350' to maintain walkability and connectivity.
- Streets should intrinsically support low operating speeds to enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- Consider implementing traffic calming measures such as:
    - On-street parking.
    - Crosswalk bulb-outs to shorten crossing distances.
    - Raised crosswalks for increased visibility and safety.
    - Narrow driving lanes (10'–11' wide for non-busways).
- Shared parking options should be implemented to maximize land use efficiency and accommodate multiple users within TOCs.
- Parking decisions will be evaluated based on the impacts to ridership and the financial, operational, and capital benefits to UTA.
- Integrate Park and Ride facilities into the development.
    - The farthest P&R stall should be no more than 700' from the center of the station platform. Exceptions may be made for well-designed TOCs, requiring UTA staff endorsement.
    - The number of parking stalls shall be determined by UTA, with consideration for shared parking opportunities.
    - All P&R facilities must be coordinated and approved by UTA and must meet the UTA Design Criteria Manual.
- Integrate Drop-off facilities into the development.
    - Walking access from drop-off points to the station platform must not exceed 400'.
    - All drop-off facilities must be coordinated and approved by UTA and must meet the UTA Design Criteria Manual.



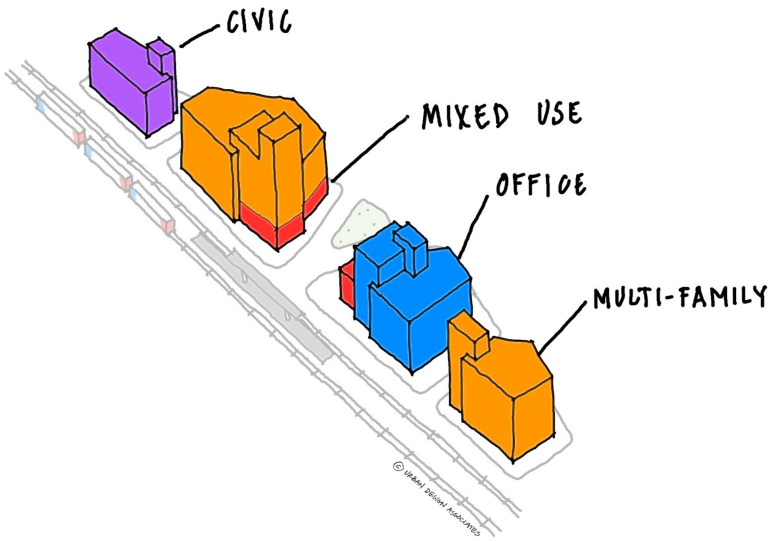
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Land Use

TOCs promote higher-intensity development around transit hubs, optimizing land use to reduce urban sprawl while preserving open spaces. This compact development model enhances access to public transportation, increasing ridership and bolstering transit viability. By integrating land use with transportation planning, TOCs align with regional strategies that emphasize sustainable growth and efficient resource management. Furthermore, TOCs foster walkable neighborhoods with accessible amenities, improving the quality of life for residents, employees, and visitors.

Mix of Uses

"Mix of Uses" refers to the integration of different types of land uses, such as residential, commercial, recreational, and institutional, within an area or development. Mixed-use developments often promote walkability and connectivity by ensuring that homes, workplaces, shops, and amenities are conveniently located and well-integrated.



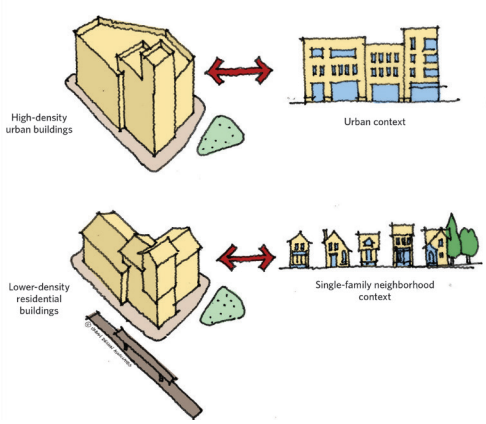
Guidelines:

- The primary street should serve as the central hub of activity.
- Ground floor uses along the primary street must include active public-serving functions (e.g., retail, hospitality).
- As developments transition away from the primary street, ground floor uses can shift to less-intensive private purposes (e.g., stoops, patios).
- Depending on the station's existing context and future growth, the following are appropriate Land Uses:
  - High-Density Residential (50+ dwelling units per acre on UTA controlled property is required unless otherwise identified on SAP)*
  - Office
  - Hospitality
  - Retail
  - Civic - school, library, hospital
  - Neighborhood scale open space
- Land uses that encourage automobile dependency or compromise pedestrian safety and comfort must be excluded. Land Uses to be avoided include:
  - Big Box Retail
  - Drive-Thru
  - Industrial
  - Storage

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Mix of Incomes

Successful TOCs should include a mix of housing types targeting various income levels to promote equity, reduce displacement, and ensure that all residents can benefit from access to high-quality transit. By offering affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing near transit hubs, TOCs can support diverse communities, reduce reliance on cars, and improve access to jobs, education, and essential services. This inclusive approach not only fosters social and economic integration but also helps create vibrant, sustainable neighborhoods where people of all income levels can thrive.



Site and Architectural Design

Site and Architectural design play a pivotal role in the success of Transit Oriented Communities. Thoughtful site planning ensures seamless integration between land use and transportation, creating environments that prioritize accessibility, safety, sustainability, and community engagement. Well-designed sites enhance connectivity by accommodating multiple modes of transportation while fostering walkable neighborhoods that encourage active lifestyles. Effective site and architectural design also contributes to creating a sense of place, blending functionality with aesthetic appeal to support vibrant, inclusive communities. By considering factors such as building placement, open spaces, parking, and pedestrian pathways, TOC site and architectural design can maximize transit access, increase ridership, and support the long-term viability of urban growth strategies.



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Building Orientation/Layout

Striking the right balance in building setbacks is crucial, as setbacks that are too small may negatively impact some land uses, while excessive ones disrupt the sense of enclosure and reduce walkability. Minimally set-back buildings oriented towards the street help define the public realm by creating spaces for sidewalks, landscaping, and street furniture that enhance the pedestrian experience. Thoughtfully designed layouts foster a sense of enclosure, guiding pedestrians safely and comfortably while creating visually appealing and memorable urban spaces.

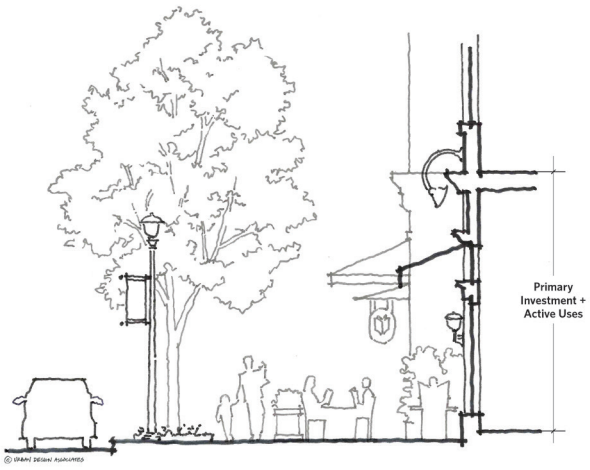
Guidelines:

- Building massings should reinforce a positive pedestrian experience and create a sense of enclosure.
- Buildings should meet the front and corner build-to lines to establish a consistent streetwall.
- Buildings along primary streets should address the street with a primary façade and entrance.
- Gaps in streetwalls should be minimized. Buildings exceeding a maximum streetwall length of 150 feet must provide variation in the physical design and articulation of the streetwall.
- All street corners should be occupied by a building unless the corner is designated as open space.
- Building setbacks shall be between 0’ and 5’ feet from the sidewalk on primary streets and 0’ to 10’ on secondary streets. A larger setback may be allowed if fronting a major corridor with more than four lanes of traffic.
- Side yard setbacks should be minimal to avoid significant gaps in the streetwall.
- Vehicular access (e.g., curb cuts) should be minimized or avoided on primary streets.
- Ground-floor residential units should have direct access to public rights of way.
- Loading and unloading areas, open storage, refuse areas, and utility appurtenances should be screened from view from all streets.

Visual Interest

Visual interest refers to design elements that make buildings and spaces engaging and appealing, such as facades, public art, landscaping, and active ground floors. These features enhance the pedestrian experience, attract investment, foster economic vitality, and support safety by increasing foot traffic and visibility in a Transit Oriented Community.

A core objective of Transit Oriented Communities is to create a pedestrian-friendly environment near transit options. For pedestrians at the street level, large, unbroken facades can feel monotonous, uninviting and even at times unsafe. Introducing visual variation through a consistent rhythm of architectural elements breaks up building mass and adds interest to a corridor. This can be achieved using features such as bay windows, corner elements, balconies, and active ground floor uses for retail.



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Guidelines:

- Building massings should incorporate both horizontal and vertical facade articulation.
- The first vertical 20 feet of a building façade is the most critical to the public, pedestrian experience and should be articulated to add interest, create a sense of rhythm, and break up the scale of the building.
- Emphasis, including enhanced materials, should be incorporated into the ground floor design, which interacts most directly with pedestrians. Additionally, architectural details should account for pedestrians' walking speed.
- The ground floor should address the street and have a high percentage of transparency and encourage movement in and out of the building.

Parking

Over-allocating parking wastes land, while right-sizing reduces costs and improves efficiency. Shared parking maximizes usage by accommodating users with complementary schedules, and adequate parking ensures convenient, safe access for transit riders while generating potential revenue for transit improvements. Structured parking minimizes impervious surfaces, mitigates urban heat effects, and enhances pedestrian comfort. Excessive parking encourages car dependency and congestion, while insufficient parking near retail can deter visitors and limit accessibility. Efficient parking strategies create space for better urban design, support walkability, and foster attractive, functional spaces.

Guidelines:

- Parking facilities and lots should be thoughtfully designed to balance functionality with aesthetic appeal, community integration, and safety.
- Structured parking lots are ideal; however, site context and market conditions ultimately determine their feasibility.
- Parking structures should incorporate active uses on the ground floor along street frontage. Including wrapping the structure with retail, residential, or office uses to limit the visibility of the structure from the street.
- Auto-centric aspects of parking structures should be screened to reduce visual impact.
- Safety and security concerns must be considered during the design process.
- Surface parking lots should be located at the rear of buildings.
- On-street parking is permissible to accommodate parking demand, especially for local retail land uses.
- Parking area entrances must include adequate signage for pedestrians and automobiles.
- Limited side yard surface parking lots may be allowed on non-primary streets if the lot is screened with walls, hedges, or berms.
- Landscape buffers must have a minimum depth of 7 feet.
- Landscaping should provide shade for parking areas and screen view from upper floors.
- Internal pedestrian pathways within parking areas must be provided in surface parking lots with two or more double-loaded aisles.
- Pathways should be separated from parking drive aisles.
- Visible parking structures must be designed to conceal the view of parked vehicles and ramps.

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Open Space

Open spaces such as parks, plazas, and greenways provide essential areas for relaxation, recreation, and social interaction, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors while increasing the appeal of the site. These green spaces contribute to environmental sustainability by managing stormwater runoff, mitigating urban heat islands, and improving air quality. Additionally, accessible open spaces support active transportation, offering enjoyable and functional pathways to transit stations.

Guidelines:

- Integrate open spaces with development by ensuring open spaces are well-connected to transit stations, pedestrian pathways, and surrounding buildings.
- Design open spaces to complement mixed-use developments and foster dynamic, multi-functional areas.
- Open spaces should be located within a 5-minute walk of transit stations and major residential or commercial areas within the TOC. See Land Use section for more Open Space Guidelines.
- Incorporate spaces for both active uses (e.g., playgrounds, exercise areas, plazas) and passive uses (e.g., seating areas, green spaces, gardens).
- Include amenities such as public art, fountains, or shaded seating to enhance visual interest and comfort.
- Prioritize safety by ensuring open spaces are well-lit, maintain open sightlines, and feel secure for users. See Safe and Thriving Communities section for more Guidelines.
- Prioritize accessibility by designing spaces to be ADA-compliant, ensuring accessibility for individuals of all abilities.
- Foster community interaction by creating spaces that encourage social interaction, such as plazas, outdoor dining areas, or event spaces, to build a sense of community and vibrancy.
- Incorporate sustainability features such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and native vegetation, to manage stormwater and enhance ecological value where feasible.
- Integrate renewable energy features, such as solar-powered lighting or charging stations, where feasible.



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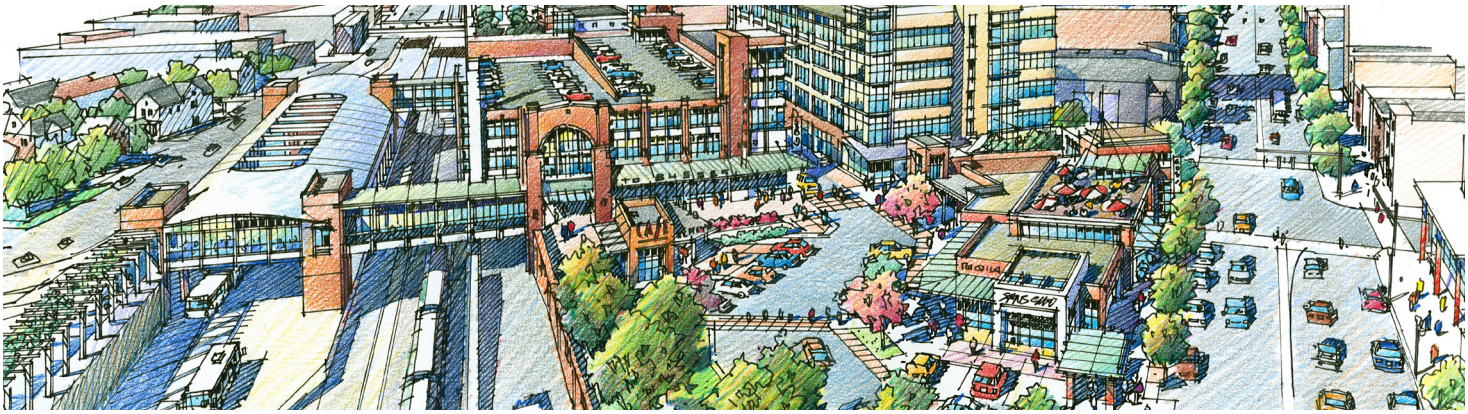
Safe and Thriving Communities

Transit Oriented Communities are designed to create safe, thriving environments that serve all users. Pedestrian safety is a critical priority for the UTA, as it directly impacts both the perception and reality of transit riders, economic vitality, and overall community well-being. A safe, well-designed public space encourages transit use, supports local businesses, and fosters vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.

The UTA recognizes that thoughtful environmental design is essential for creating accessible, safe, and welcoming public spaces. Effective design not only encourages transit ridership but also contributes to the long-term success of TOCs. These guidelines aim to establish station areas that prioritize safety, promote public transit use, attract investment, and cultivate active, viable communities. By integrating strategic environmental design principles, this approach enhances public acceptance of TOCs as a key component of urban development.

When applied to Transit Oriented Communities, environmental design should support the creation of secure, dynamic spaces around transit stations. The following strategies outline key design principles that contribute to the success of TOCs:

1. Watchful Presence - TOCs that incorporate proper environmental design to activate ground-floor uses with transparent storefronts that serve as “eyes on the street,” which deter unwanted behavior near transit hubs.
2. Territorial Reinforcement - Clear boundaries between public spaces (like plazas or walkways), semi-public areas, and private developments within TOCs help residents and businesses take ownership of their surroundings, which fosters stewardship and deters crime.
3. Natural Access Control - In station areas, pathways, entry points, and access to buildings and transit uses should be designed to channel movement efficiently and predictably. This discourages loitering and unauthorized access while supporting safe pedestrian flows.
4. Maintenance and Image - To attract users, TOC buildings, facilities, and public spaces must be clean, well-lit, and actively managed. A maintained environment signals care and oversight and discourages vandalism.
5. Activity Support - TOCs thrive on active environments. Proper environmental design supports this by encouraging development of place making that includes day and evening retail, cafés, public spaces, and residential uses that produce both day and nighttime activity and eyes on the street.



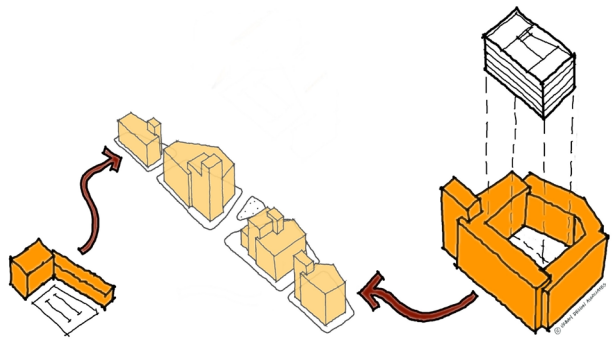
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Management

The UTA's commitment to developing Transit Oriented Communities requires a proactive approach to managing development around transit stations. By guiding land use, infrastructure investment, and urban design, UTA and our partners can ensure that development supports the goals of economic growth, accessibility, efficient land use, sustainability, and housing affordability. Proactive management is aimed at aligning private development interests with public transit objectives, ensuring that density, mix of uses, and pedestrian connectivity are optimized to support transit ridership and reduce automobile dependency. Proper management and promotion of TOC goals will ensure opportunities to capture value and address regional growth challenges.

Maintenance

Developers of a project within a TOC need to integrate long-term maintenance costs into development budgets, upkeep of public spaces to insure they remain safe, functional, and inviting, ensuring they continue to serve their communities effectively while protecting the investment made in urban infrastructure.



Proper maintenance of transit facilities and public spaces is essential to fostering a safe, welcoming, and well-functioning environment for all users. Well-kept infrastructure not only enhances public confidence in transit systems but also reinforces a sense of security and reliability. Clean, well-lit, and structurally sound spaces encourage transit ridership, support local businesses, and contribute to vibrant, accessible communities. Additionally, routine upkeep ensures the longevity of these assets, reducing costly repairs and preserving their value over time. To achieve this, it is crucial that developers allocate dedicated funding for ongoing maintenance as part of their project planning.

Parking

Managing parking demand for TOCs requires approaches to optimize existing parking resources while providing means to reduce dependence on automobiles promoting transit friendly alternatives. Successful implementation hinges on balancing adequate parking and alternative access to for station, retail, and commercial activities.

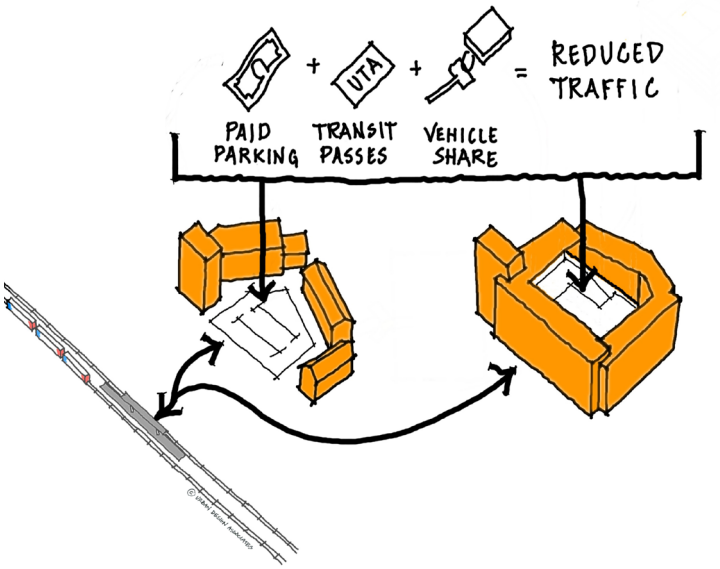
Guidelines:

- Optimize parking supply. When new parking facilities are necessary, the UTA desires strategies that include shared parking and thoughtful design to ensure parking developments do not permanently obstruct future growth on prime sites near the station.

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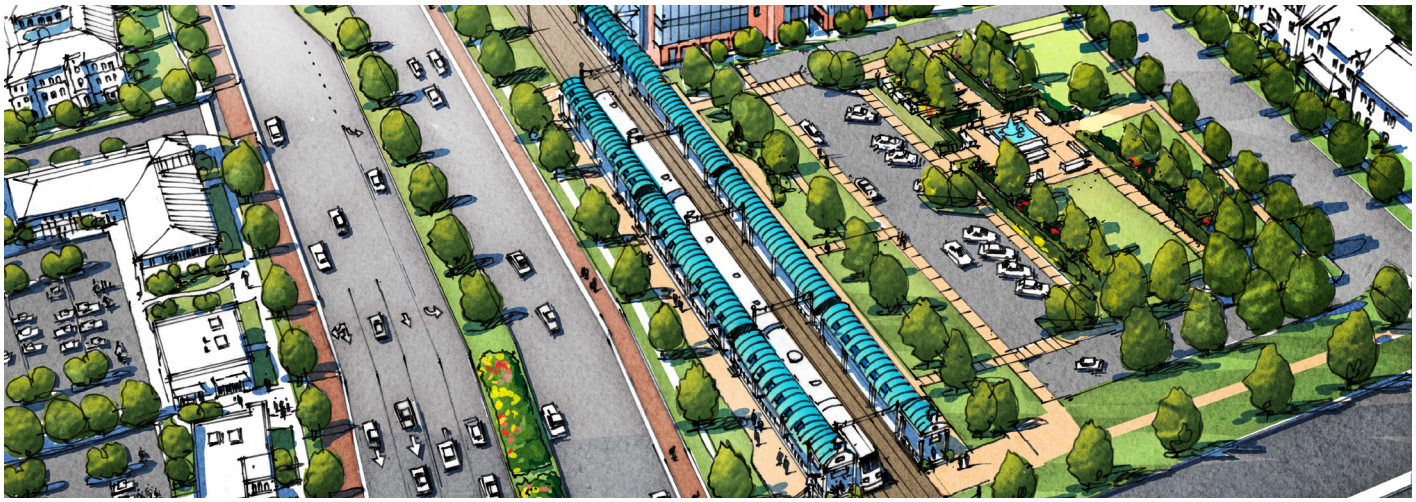
Transportation Demand Management

To be successful, TOCs require managing transportation demand to prioritize access to multimodal transit systems, prevent the over dedication of land to excessive parking, and promote alternatives to vehicle use. Transportation Demand Management (TDM) tools may include transit use incentives, creation of bike infrastructure, and shared parking policies to reduce peak-hour strain on a TOC's infrastructure. The management of demand aims to make it easier for residents, workers, and visitors to choose a transit, walking, or biking option as a mode of travel.



Guidelines:

- Transit Use Incentives: Strategies should be enacted to provide transit passes for residents and employees within TOCs and partner with UTA to install real-time transit arrival signage in residential, commercial, and employment centers.
- Bicycle and Active Transportation support should be targeted to directly reduce parking demand.
- Designate bicycle-priority corridors that connect directly to transit stations and regional trail networks.
- Provide shared mobility options within each development (e.g. car or bike share, scooters, etc.) available to residents and employees.



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6. Conclusion

The Utah Transit Authority's Transit Oriented Communities Guidelines represent an important tool in managing the state's growth while preserving its quality of life. By promoting walkability, multimodal connectivity, and compact, mixed-use neighborhoods, TOCs reduce auto-dependency, increase transit ridership, and create vibrant places that serve residents, businesses, and future generations.

These guidelines provide a foundation for comprehensive station area planning, promoting dynamic mixed-use hubs that reduce automobile dependency, enhance economic activity, and improve accessibility. By aligning TOCs with the Wasatch Choice Vision, the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and state priorities, UTA reinforces its commitment to sustainable regional development, enhanced transit accessibility, and housing affordability.

These guidelines are not rigid mandates, but flexible frameworks—designed to be tailored to each station area while upholding UTA's commitment to accessibility, sustainability, and economic opportunity. Where available, stakeholders should reference adopted Station Area Plans for contextual guidance. As Utah continues to grow, these TOC principles provide a clear and coordinated path toward a more connected, livable, and resilient region. Through strategic planning and collaboration, TOCs represent a forward-thinking approach to sustainable growth in Utah, ensuring that future development remains efficient, equitable, and environmentally responsible.

