

## South Corridor Transit Station Area Plans

Map 1: Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework



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# Introduction

The opening in 2007 of the South Corridor Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, also known as the LYNX Blue Line, marks the turning of a page in Charlotte's history. For the first time, rapid transit provides a competitive alternative to the automobile. This change offers the opportunity to enhance the City's existing growth pattern by promoting higher intensity development where transportation infrastructure capacity is greatest, such as around rapid transit stations.

This document accompanies the Station Area Plans, providing background on the planning philosophy on which they were founded.

Adoption of the South Corridor Transit Station Area Plans is a key step in promoting continued growth and development in a way that helps achieve our overall community vision, consistent with the Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework. These plans recommend changes to the development pattern around stations along the LYNX Blue Line. Creating these "Transit Station Areas" within the context of the larger Growth Corridor will help to complement the transit investment, while also accommodating a portion of the City's future growth. This document accompanies the Station Area Plans, providing background on the planning philosophy on which they were founded.

## **Growth Framework**

Since the 1980s, Charlotte has been one of the nation's fastest growing urban areas. Between 1980 and 2005, Charlotte grew from the  $47^{\text{th}}$  to the  $20^{\text{th}}$  most populated city in the United States. By 2030, it is projected that Charlotte will gain another 350,000

residents and 380,000 jobs. Charlotte's future will be defined by its ability to effectively accommodate this anticipated population and employment growth.

Historically, the City has accommodated its increasing number of residents and workers by expanding outward. In recent decades the rate of outward expansion has surpassed the rate of population growth. The resulting dispersed growth pattern has placed an enormous strain on Charlotte's environment and infrastructure. Left unrestrained, this growth pattern could ultimately impact our region's economic wellbeing and quality of life.

In the early 1990s, the City developed a strategy for dealing with its explosive growth - the Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework. The framework, which currently is being updated, is based on Charlotte's traditional pattern of growth, which has focused around major transportation Corridors and several key Centers. These Corridors and Centers have the highest existing and planned infrastructure capacity in the City. The framework aims to make the most efficient use of this infrastructure by focusing the majority of new development in Centers and Corridors. Wedges are the primarily residential areas that lie between the City's five radial corridors. The framework also envisions maintaining Wedges as mainly residential neighborhoods, reflecting the existing development pattern in those areas. Map 1 shows the location of Charlotte's Centers, Corridors and Wedges.

## The South Corridor

Corridors, as defined by the Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework, are linear districts with a parallel network of high capacity transportation facilities. These facilities can include rapid transit, interstates/freeways, major thoroughfares and freight rail.



CATS light rail transit vehicle.



Light rail station platform in South End.

## eas The LRT Line

Two characteristics of Growth Corridors make them ideal location for fixed guideway rapid transit systems. First, their linear nature means that much of the land in a Corridor can be within walking distance or short driving distance of strategically located transit stations. In this regard, the population of a Corridor is well-served by transit. Secondly, the additional access created by transit allows a Corridor to absorb higher density development, thereby fulfilling its intended function.

The LYNX Blue Line is the first to be developed in Charlotte's comprehensive rapid transit system, defined in the 2030 Corridor System Plan (shown on Map 2). LRT was the chosen rapid transit technology for the South Corridor. LRT is comprised of an electric train powered by overhead lines operating in a fixed guideway and stopping frequently at stations where riders board from a platform.

Planning for the LYNX Blue Line began in the late 1990s and followed the process required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for projects seeking federal funding. This included a major investment study (MIS), an environmental impact statement (EIS), final design and construction.

Within a Corridor there are two types of unique areas that reflect the influence of different aspects of the transportation system.

- Interchange Areas surround interstate or freeway interchanges (typically within 1/2 mile.) These areas are usually developed with a combination of retail, moderate density residential, office and/or industrial uses designed primarily for vehicular access.
- **Transit Station Areas** are higher density areas within a 1/2 mile walk of an existing or planned rapid transit station. They typically provide a mixture of pedestrian-oriented housing, employment and retail services designed to promote travel to and from them on transit.

Areas not included in Interchange Areas or Transit Station Areas are classified as **General Corridor Areas.** 

The South Corridor exemplifies the characteristics of a Growth Corridor. Interstate 77, South Boulevard, the Norfolk Southern Railroad (NSRR) line and the new LXNX Blue line run parallel to one another allowing a high degree of access to Corridor land uses. Within the Corridor are a series of Transit Station Areas along the LYNX Blue line. There also are Interchange Areas along I-77, generally addressed in the Station Area Plans as a part of a larger General Corridor Area.



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Map 3: Boundaries of South Corridor Transit Station Area Plans



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Sacramento's St. Rose of Lima Park station is an example of an urban rapid transit station.

The LRT line opened in late 2007, operating along a 9.6 mile long route connecting Center City to I-485, near Pineville. The line is projected to carry 18,000 people per day by 2027. The alignment generally follows South Boulevard and the existing NSRR tracks, as shown on Map 3. More specifically:

- From Uptown through South End, the light rail line shares the former NSRR right of way with the Charlotte Trolley;
- From South End to Woodlawn, the light rail operates in the former NSRR right of way and, for a short distance, in the median of South Boulevard; and
- From Woodlawn to I-485, the light rail operates on an alignment parallel to the existing NSRR track.

Every mile or so the light rail vehicle stops at a station to pick up and drop off riders. There are fifteen stations along the LYNX Blue Line, each with slightly different characteristics. Based on common features, the stations have been categorized into five types. These are shown on Map 3 and described below.

• Urban Stations are walk and bike up stations that serve the area within a 1/2 mile radius of the station. They do not include park-and-ride facilities. Urban stations are designed to fit within the existing community fabric.



Beaverton Transit Center in Portland, Oregon is an example of a community station.

- Neighborhood Stations are primarily walk and bike up stations that serve a 1 mile radius with the support of bus connections. They may include small park-and-ride facilities. They are also designed to fit within the existing community fabric.
- **Community Stations** serve multiple destinations within a 3 mile radius with heavy reliance on bus connections and park-and-ride facilities. They are often located in areas that are not initially transit oriented, but will transform into transit oriented areas over time.
- **Regional Stations** are located at the end of the line or near regional roadways, serving an area of 5 miles or greater with the assistance of bus connections and park-and-ride facilities. Even though they are frequently located in greenfield environments, their access creates a relatively strong potential for transit oriented development.
- **Multi-Modal Stations** are located at the confluence of multiple rapid transit lines, providing transfer between these modes. Multi-modal stations play a key civic role and include highquality finishes and public space.

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Ground floor retail is desired in transit station areas to bring the services needed to support transit riders and area residents.

### Transit Station Area Plans

A Transit Station Area, as envisioned by the Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework, is desired around each of the stations along the South Corridor LRT line. The City is developing Transit Station Area plans to guide the growth of these areas. Plans typically examine a study area larger than the 1/2 mile walk distance to the station to provide context for the station area. In fact, they can cover a broad cross-section of a Corridor, including Interchange Proximity areas, and even portions of Wedges.

#### Purpose of the Plans

Transit Station Area Plans are intended to provide an in-depth look at the current conditions in the area surrounding the LRT station and make recommendations to:

- Facilitate the right mix of development and appropriate infrastructure to complement the transit investment; and
- Optimize the land use and infrastructure within the larger Corridor to support its continued ability to accommodate growth.



Multi-modal streets are part of an infrastructure system that accommodates future growth by providing travel choices.

There are Transit Station Area Plans covering eleven stations along the South Corridor. The boundaries for these plans' study areas are shown on Map 3. Each of these station area plans:

- Update their respective district plan, providing land use policy direction for the study area;
- Become the official streetscape plan, which mandates the building setback and streetscape standards for properties with urban zoning districts. These currently include Transit Oriented Development (TOD), Transit Supportive Overlay (TS), Neighborhood Services (NS), Mixed Use Development District (MUDD), Uptown Mixed Use District (UMUD), Pedestrian Oriented Development Overlay (PED), and Urban Residential (UR); and
- Provide guidance for recommended infrastructure investments.

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#### Policy Guidance for Plans

Guidance for developing these Transit Station Area Plans comes from a number of policies adopted and in progress. Each of these and their relevance to the transit station area planning process is described below.

#### Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework

The Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework is the overarching policy for growth in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. It provides guidance on land use types and intensities, urban design, transportation and infrastructure desired in Growth Corridors, where all transit station areas are located. An update of the growth framework is expected to be adopted by City Council in 2008.

#### General Development Policies (GDP)

The General Development Policies are a collection of policies on various topics relevant to future development and redevelopment in the Charlotte community. Phase I of the GDP was adopted in 2003 and included policies on Residential Location and Design, Retail Oriented Mixed/Multi-Use Centers, and the Plan Amendment Process. It also incorporated the Transit Station Area Principles, previously adopted in 2001. Phase II of the GDP was adopted in 2007, and includes chapters on the Environment and Infrastructure.

#### Transit Station Area Principles

The Transit Station Area Principles (2001) make general recommendations for the type of land use, design and transportation facilities desired within 1/2 mile walk of rapid transit stations. Since this area is the primary focus of Station Area Plans, the Transit Station Area Principles, summarized in Figure 1, are heavily relied upon in making recommendations for the plans. Because the Transit Station Area Principles provide specific density and design guidance, other chapters of the GDP, such as Residential Location and Design, do not apply within the plan boundaries. Transit Station Area Plans provide an in-depth look at current conditions and make recommendations to support both the transit investment and the continued growth of the Corridor.

#### Environmental GDP

The Environmental Chapter of the General Development Policies sets environmental objectives for the City. These include:

- Making the protection of the natural environment a priority in land use and development decisions;
- Facilitating a land use pattern to accommodate growth while respecting the natural environment;
- Promoting environmentally sensitive site designs; and
- Balancing environmental concerns with each other, as well as with other land development considerations.

#### Infrastructure GDP

The Infrastructure Chapter of the General Development Policies links land use and land development decisions to the availability of public infrastructure needed to support it. The objectives include:

- Defining infrastructure needs and coordinating its provision with growth; and
- Using existing infrastructure resources efficiently.

#### Transportation Action Plan/Urban Street Design Guidelines

The Transportation Action Plan (TAP), adopted in May 2006, sets the vision for Charlotte to become the "premier city in the country for integrating land use and transportation choices." It identifies short and long term policies and an implementation blueprint of \$3.5 billion in transportation improvement projects. The TAP uses the Centers, Corridors and Wedges growth framework as its guiding vision; consequently its policies and projects enhance and support that vision.

The Urban Street Design Guidelines (USDG), adopted in October 2007, provide a comprehensive approach to planning and designing new and modified streets in Charlotte. They offer recommendations on block lengths and street cross-sections. The USDG serve as the basis for many of the streetscape recommendations in the station area plans.

#### Transit Station Area Joint Development Principles and Policies

The Joint Development Principles and Policies were adopted by the City of Charlotte and neighboring jurisdictions in 2002. They provide a coordinated set of objectives and implementation tools for the development of station areas across Mecklenburg County. Along with the Transit Station Area Principles from the GDP, they guide the recommendations of the station area plans, especially implementation actions.

#### Plan Development and Adoption Process

The South Corridor Transit Station Area Plans, prepared by a City of Charlotte interdepartmental team led by the Planning Department, are based on input from area residents, property owners, and developers, as well as consultant studies and technical analysis. This effort included many public meetings (some in conjunction with the CATS public meetings for the design of the LRT line), as well as numerous conferences, phone calls and other communication with property owners, developers, neighborhood leaders and other interested stakeholders. The Station Area Plans are the result of input from area residents, property owners, and developers, as well as consultant studies and technical analysis.

The final draft plans will subsequently be presented to and reviewed by the general public. The Planning Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission will consider the plans, forwarding their recommendation to the Charlotte City Council for final review and consideration for adoption.

#### Plan Organization

The Station Area Plans are organized into chapters that:

- First, provide an overview of the study area and identify opportunities and constraints to achieving the City's objectives for the plan area, especially the transit station area;
- Secondly, propose a vision for the future of the study area and offer recommendations to move towards that vision; and
- Lastly, suggest specific actions to be taken to implement the recommendations.

The study area analysis, vision and recommendations are part of Volume I: The Concept Plan. This portion of the document is adopted by City Council and becomes City policy. The action items to implement the recommendations can be found in Volume II: The Implementation Plan. Volume II is not adopted by City Council; rather it is used to guide staff efforts to implement the Concept Plan. An overview of existing conditions is found in the Appendix of each plan.

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## South Corridor Transit Station Area Plans

Figure 1: Summary of Transit Station Area Principles (This figure summarizes the policies of the Transit Station Area Principles (2001). The original wording for the policies can be found in the first chapter of the General Development Policies.)

### Land Use

- Encourage highest density uses (15 20 dua/ 0.5 0.75 FAR) closest to the transit station and transition to lower densities adjacent to existing single family neighborhoods.
- Encourage a mixture of residential, office, service-oriented retail and civic uses, either through mixed or multi-use development.
- Disallow automobile-dependent uses, such as automobile sales lots, car washes and drive-thru windows.
- Consider special traffic generators such as cultural, educational, entertainment or recreational uses to locate in station areas.
- Preserve existing stable neighborhoods.
- Encourage a mixture of housing types, including workforce/ affordable housing.



## Community Design

- Orient buildings to front on public streets or open spaces.
- Minimize setbacks and locate parking to the rear.
- Provide windows and doors at street level and minimize walking distance to entrances.
- Screen unsightly elements, such as dumpsters, loading docks, service entrances and outdoor storage from the transitway.
- Include active uses on the ground floor of parking structures.
- Include elements such as street trees, pedestrian scale lighting and benches in streetscape design to encourage pedestrian activity.
- Place utilities underground, wherever possible.
- Establish public open spaces that act as development catalysts and serve as focal points around transit stations.
- Design open spaces to be centers of activity that include items such as benches, fountains and public art.

## Mobility

- Create a multi-modal environment that emphasizes pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Provide an extensive pedestrian system throughout the station area to minimize walking distances, connect to neighborhoods, accommodate large groups of people, and eliminate sidewalk gaps.
- Design the pedestrian system to be accessible, safe and attractive, by using planting strips, street trees, on-street parking and bicycle lanes.
- Develop an interconnected street network with maximum block lengths of 400'; provide mid-block crossings if blocks are larger.
- Establish parking maximums, rather than minimums.
- Minimize surface parking and encourage shared parking facilities.



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