SOUTHCENTER – TUKWILA'S URBAN CENTER

PURPOSE

Urban centers are described in King County's Countywide Planning Policies as areas of concentrated employment and housing, with direct service by high-capacity transit. They are to encompass a wide range of land uses, including retail, recreation, public facilities, parks, residential, and open space.

In 1995 Tukwila's urban center, *Southcenter*, was designated one of the region's urban centers, in keeping with a desire for development as a high-density, regionally oriented, mixed-use center.

The vision for Southcenter is consistent with Puget Sound Regional Council's *Vision 2040*, the adopted regional growth strategy which provides guidance to cities and counties for accommodating future growth. The strategy is designed to preserve resource lands and protect rural lands from urban-type development by promoting infill and redevelopment within urban areas to create more compact, walkable, sustainable and transit-friendly communities.

All levels of government in the central Puget Sound's four counties use Vision 2040 as a regional framework for making local decisions. King County was required to prepare broad Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) that comply with both the growth principles of the Growth Management Act and the more directive policies of the Multi-County Planning Policies (Vision 2040).

Under this strategy the majority of the region's employment and housing growth is targeted to occur in Metropolitan Cities and Core Cities. Tukwila is a Core City with a designated urban center intended to become a compact, sustainable community where housing and jobs are located in a manner that provides for easy mobility and accessibility.

Planning for a regional urban center as defined by the Countywide Planning Policies earns preferential treatment by the transit providers for fixed-rail transit service and other transit service and facility improvements. The idea is to help ensure the long-term economic viability and competitiveness of urban centers in the region as energy costs escalate, congestion increases and consumer preferences shift. In 2002, the City began a planning process to create a plan for Southcenter. A primary focus of the Plan was retaining the urban center's competitive edge and economic strength as retail development grows within the region.

The City held six public workshops and found that participants supported the following concepts:

1) Making the Southcenter area a more attractive destination for shopping and leisure activities;
2) Relieving critical congestion points, improving circulation, and making alternative modes of transportation available;

3) Supporting existing businesses and attracting new; and,
4) Creating opportunities for residential development in appropriate areas.

It was proposed that an initial catalyst of public investment in key areas would be needed to leverage this vision of enhanced and diversified economic vitality.

The policies set forth in this Comprehensive Plan element support and extend the qualities of the existing center that have been responsible for its economic success in the past, and expand on these characteristics. Land use polices focus on flexibility in and diversity of uses. Urban design policies provide a vision for the community, to be achieved through public and private sector initiative and cooperation. Transportation and circulation policies emphasize accessibility as a key factor, as well as choice in transportation modes and routes. These policies will reinforce future competitiveness and will create an urban center that gives identity to the City for the surrounding neighborhoods and for the region.

ISSUES

The area comprising Southcenter currently provides regional comparison shopping, major discount shopping, major facilities for incubator businesses, entertainment, and a full range of professional services. It encompasses more intensely developed areas such as Westfield Southcenter Mall and Andover Industrial Park, transportation facilities such as the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station, and natural features and amenities such as Tukwila Pond, Minkler Pond, and the Green River.

Retail uses dominate Southcenter; Westfield Southcenter Mall, in the northwest corner of the center, is the largest regional shopping mall in the Seattle area. Warehouse uses are more prominent in the area to the south.

A goal of growth management is to integrate housing and job growth in order to reduce the need for long commutes, and to keep living and working communities easily accessible to each other. Southcenter is considered a significant employment center within the Puget Sound region, providing jobs to residents and nearby communities. However, considerable residential development is needed in the urban center to meet the City's housing targets. Consequently, the vision for Southcenter responds by expanding opportunities for housing, accommodating the majority of the City's projected housing needs, and addressing the types of amenities and infrastructure needed to attract quality housing.

The vision for Southcenter takes into account the King County Countywide Planning Policies criteria for urban centers and has been formulated by recognizing that "the intent of the Countywide Planning Policies is to encourage the growth of each urban center as a unique, vibrant community that is an attractive place to live and work, will support efficient public services including transit, and responds to local needs and markets for jobs and housing" (King County Ordinance No. 11446, Section D2, lines 25-28).

The goals and policies of this element recognize that Southcenter's path for higher-density growth will take place during and beyond the 20-year horizon of the Countywide Policies. While urban centers play an integral role in the regional vision, the Countywide Policies clearly delineate that

the form and function of these centers will be determined at the local level. The characteristics of Southcenter are compared with the King County Countywide Planning Policies in *Figure 22*.

Amended Countywide Planning Policies Urban Center Criteria		Recommended Characteristics for Southcenter, Tukwila's urban center
1	Planned for 20 years	Southcenter planned for 30+ years
2	Total land area of up to 1.5 square miles (1,440 acres)	Southcenter is approximately 1.35 square miles
3	Requires 15,000 employees within one-half mile (walking distance) of a transit center	The area is planned to allow this density.
4	Average of 50 employees per gross acre	Southcenter is planned to allow this density.
5	Average of 15 households per gross acre	Specific Southcenter areas are planned to allow residential uses, particularly in the area within walking distance of the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station and the bus transit center.
6	Emphasis on mass transportation and non-motorized modes, while lessening dependency on single occupancy vehicles	Strong motorized and non-motorized connections are planned between the urban center and the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station. Enhanced bus transit facilities serve the urban center core including bus rapid transit (BRT). Additional potential forms of high capacity transit (HCT) directly serving Southcenter include local area transit routes and future phases of light rail. Roadway improvements, including enhanced streetscapes, will improve auto, transit, bicycle and pedestrian movement and access. An enhanced street network will improve mobility. Facilities developed will recognize the actual and projected need and demand for motor vehicle, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities.
7	Promotion of high caliber urban design standards and support for capital public improvements	Design standards and high quality public/ private capital improvements are key to attracting the types of development that will achieve the vision for Southcenter.
8	Receives first priority for development of high-capacity transit center and regionally funded support infrastructure	A Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station and a bus transit center are located in Southcenter. Ensuring that additional high-capacity transit facilities serve the urban center will require active City involvement in regional planning processes.
9	Receives other funding and streamlined permit processing incentives	Explore a SEPA planned action or infill development exception for Southcenter area.

Figure 22 – Countywide policies compared to Southcenter, Tukwila's urban center

VISION STATEMENT

Southcenter, Tukwila's urban center, is an economically vibrant, motor vehicle oriented area. It owes much of its success to a high level of regional accessibility and in the past, a lack of competition within the region, as well as the 30+ year vision and vigor of its development community.

The land use, design and transportation portions of the Southcenter Plan focus on what it takes to keep the area's successful economic engine running, and to make Southcenter more competitive and attractive over the long term - transitioning Southcenter into a great place for working, shopping, doing business, living and playing. Great places contribute to the well-being of people and communities. An area made up of great places will continue to attract people and their expenditures. These attracted expenditures, in turn, provide the City of Tukwila the fiscal means to continue providing our community with excellent public services and improvements.

The vision for Southcenter's next 30–50 years foresees a high-density area with regional employment, walkable, as well as auto-oriented shopping and entertainment districts, areas of high quality housing near water amenities and within walking distance of the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station and the new bus transit center, and recreational opportunities for business people, residents, and visitors. Support for interlinked transit and a pedestrian system to supplement an improved road network are included in the future; as well as sensitively enhancing the accessibility to the City's natural amenities, such as Tukwila Pond, Minkler Pond, and the Green River.

Achieving this long-range vision of an economically and environmentally sustainable community is anticipated to be a gradual process. It should be pursued by reinforcing the Southcenter's strengths and increasing its overall attractiveness through a combination of public and private investment. This would support both new and existing businesses and the continuation of market-sensitive transitions.

Notable future features include:

- Improved connection between Westfield Southcenter Mall and Tukwila Pond Park.
- A core area of high quality, walkable retail, entertainment, housing, public spaces and employment creating a memorable destination within the region.
- Anchor areas linked by frequent transit service (5 to 10 minute busses or shuttles), enhanced with public and private pedestrian facilities, and development standards supporting this type of built environment.
- High-quality transit and pedestrian facilities, focusing on creating strong connections between the Mall and the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station.
- Overall improvements to the network of streets, trails, sidewalks, and other infrastructure.
- Encouragement of a pedestrian-oriented environment through building and streetscape design standards and guidelines.

- Sub-districts differentiated through uses and development standards.

Southcenter's Boundaries

Northern - Properties south of Interstate 405

Southern - 180th Street with some properties on south side of the street

Eastern - The center of the Green River between 180th Street and the southern boundary of properties which abut the south side of the Strander Boulevard alignment, thence eastward to the City limits.

Western - Toe of west valley wall

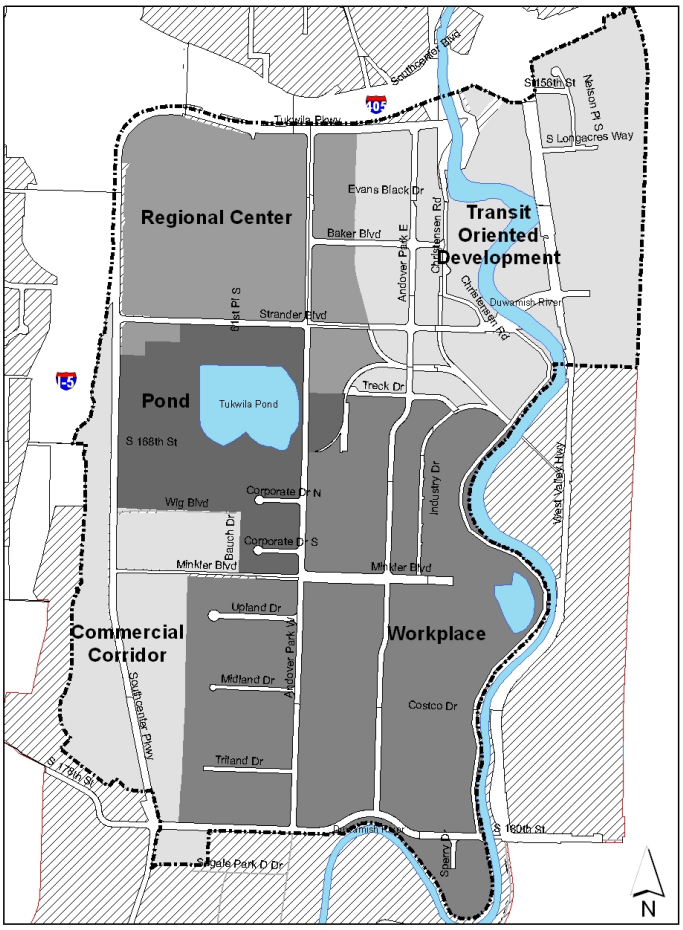


Figure 23 – Tukwila's urban center (Southcenter) boundaries

GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals, policies, and strategies have been formulated to reflect the established vision for Southcenter. These policies will help achieve the desired form and function of Tukwila's urban center over the 30 to 50-year planning period.

These goals and policies cover the issues of land use, urban development, and transportation and circulation. They aim to develop and protect the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of Southcenter by creating an attractive and functional environment to live and recreate, as well as retain its reputation as a good place to work, shop, and do business.

Goal 10.1 Land Use

Southcenter will contain an intense, diverse mix of uses, which will evolve over time. The character and pace of this evolution will be set by a combination of guidelines, regulations, incentives, market conditions, and proactive private/public actions which reinforce existing strengths and open new opportunities, and the desire for a high quality environment for workers, visitors, and residents.

Land Use Policies

10.1.1 Recognize Southcenter as a regional commercial/industrial area, with opportunities for high quality, mixed use transit oriented development, including housing, served by a balance of auto, pedestrian, bicycle and transit facilities. (Figures 24 and 25)

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Expand the areas where residential uses are permitted.

Figure 24 – Envisioned high-density development in Southcenter

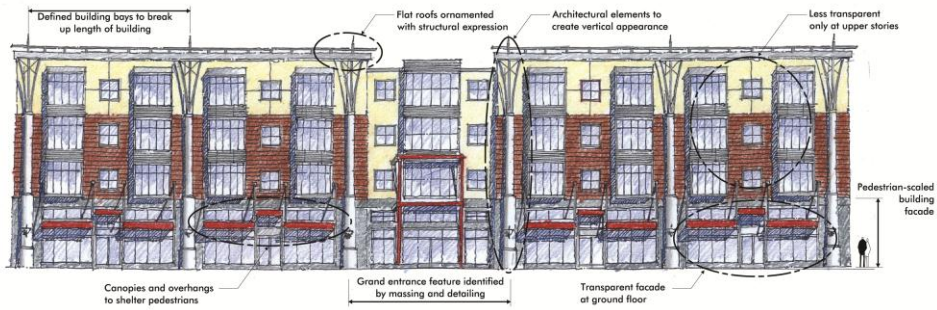


Figure 25 – Envisioned medium-density development in Southcenter

10.1.2 Public and private investment shall facilitate and encourage overall growth and redevelopment in Southcenter.

10.1.3 **Tukwila Urban Center (Southcenter) "Districts."** Southcenter encompasses a relatively large area containing a wide variety of uses. To create a more coherent urban form and enhance the Center's long-term competitive edge within the region guide development and change to create distinct areas where the character, forms, types of uses and activities benefit, complement, and support each other.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Public Amenities Plan.
- Development regulations that allow appropriate building heights within each district.
- Design guidelines that promote a high-quality urban environment and facilitate a range of pedestrian activity, where appropriate.
- Transit service and station improvements, as coordinated with transit providers.
- Utilize flexible zoning regulations to allow uses including residential, retail and light industrial, where appropriate for each district's purpose.
- Develop regulations to address setback and lot coverage restrictions that allow for future street expansions, new streets and other circulation improvements.
- Design Review standards to enforce quality landscape and design.

10.1.4 **Tukwila Urban Center (Southcenter) Residential Uses.** A large percentage of the City's future housing needs will be accommodated in the urban center in order to preserve our existing residential neighborhoods. Allow residential development in proximity to water amenities or within walking distance of the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station or the bus transit center, subject to design standards and incentives.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- Develop standards and incentives for providing a variety of different types of open spaces (e.g., plazas, parks, public & private) that are used to attract residential development and, as the area intensifies, balance out the increasingly dense environment.

- Use access to transit facilities and amenities to instigate surrounding residential and mixed use development.

Goal 10.2 Urban Development

Encourage and allow a central focus in the northern portion of the Southcenter area. Throughout Southcenter, the natural and built environments are attractive, functional, environmentally sustainable, and distinctive, and support a range of mixed uses promoting business, shopping, recreation, entertainment, and residential opportunities.

Urban Development Policies

10.2.1 **Natural Environment.** Recognize, protect, and enhance the open space network by augmenting existing parks, enhancing access to passive and active recreation areas such as Tukwila Pond, Minkler Pond and the Green River; and by improving air and water quality and preserving natural resources; thereby effectively integrating the natural and built environments in Southcenter. In addition, recognize that open space amenities are attractors for a wide range of uses, including housing and office.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Seek opportunities for public/private partnerships

- Promote use of indigenous plant materials

- Promote use of water-saving plant materials

- Promote use of plant materials with wildlife habitat value

- Implement the Master Plan and water quality improvement program for Tukwila Pond Park

10.2.2 **Green River.** In conjunction with the City's Shoreline Master Program and flood protection goals for the Green River, as Southcenter redevelops maintain or improve the River's visual and physical accessibility for residents, workers, businesses and civic life.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

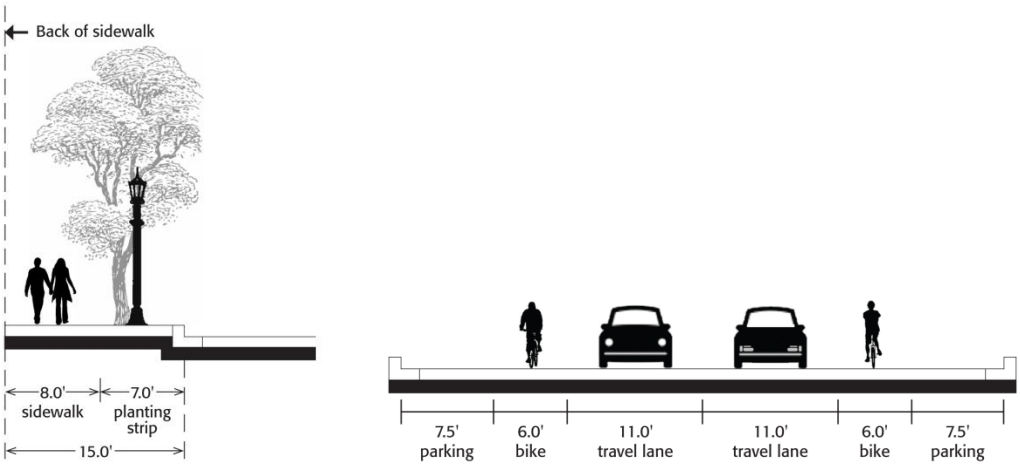
- Develop a vegetation plan for the mid-slope bench of the levee that ensures view corridors are maintained at appropriate intervals when sections of the levee are set back in accordance with the City's approved Shoreline Master program's levee profile.

- Develop a plan that ensures that the potential public access points at street ends identified in City's Shoreline Master Program are implemented as redevelopment occurs in Southcenter.

10.2.3 **Streets, Streetscape, and Pedestrian Environment.** Create a "complete street" network that establishes a finer grained street grid, reflects the demand and need for motor vehicles, transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists; provides a safe, convenient, attractive, and comfortable pedestrian and bicycling environment that eliminates potential conflicts and promotes safety for all modes of travel; and reinforces the different functions of streets by creating distinct identities for major rights-of-way. *(Figure 26)*

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Coordinate with the City Public Works Department to create a Street Master Plan that establishes a finer grained street system for the Southcenter Area and requires development to share in the cost of providing new streets.
- Employ mechanisms and incentives by which a finer grid system and public frontage improvements can be implemented by the Street Master Plan.
- Coordinate with the Public Works Department to prepare an access management plan for the Southcenter area which requires the consolidation of driveways and access points, wherever possible
- Use development regulations to maximize visibility at intersections for safety
- Develop streetscape design standards that reflect distinct street type, identity, mode of transportation served, and design goals
- Update the Street Tree Plan for the Southcenter area (CBD)
- Seek additional funding for construction of the pedestrian bridge over the Green River, connecting the Mall to the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station.



Public Frontage New thoroughfare cross-section

Figure 26 – Example of envisioned Southcenter streetscape

10.2.4 **Site Development.** Create regulations and design guidelines to result in high-quality site design and contribute to the creation of enjoyable and safe pedestrian environments through the use of site design techniques that include but are not limited to:

— integration of architectural, site design, and landscape elements;

— the co-existence of motor vehicle, transit service, and pedestrian traffic (Figure 27);

— implementing physical and natural elements that enhance an area's overall aesthetic, including street orientation (Figure 28).

— encourage extension of the street grid system

10.2.5 Siting and orientation of buildings and parking lots should create an environment that is conducive to walking in the northern part of the Southcenter area, particularly in the area between the Mall, the bus transit center and the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Over the short to midterm, focus public and private investments and regulations on properties fronting Baker Boulevard between the Mall and the Sounder station.

10.2.6 Require interior vehicular connection between adjacent parking areas wherever possible.

10.2.7 Development standards should consider the needs of land owners, developers, businesses, and the community.

Figure 27 – Site development – pedestrian connections through parking lots connecting street edge to building entrances.

Figure 28 – Southcenter site development – building orientation to street

10.2.8 **Parking.** Ensure an adequate supply of parking for visitors, employees, residents and customers. Provide a variety of flexible regulations, strategies and programs to meet parking demands. On-going needs shall also be assessed to ensure appropriate parking requirements and to encourage efficient and effective use of land in parking design (Figure 29).

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Conduct a public parking structure feasibility study, including siting, potential funding sources and mechanisms.
- Investigate alternative parking strategies such as shared parking, transit tradeoffs, etc.
- Look for opportunities for on-street parking in areas planned for higher pedestrian activity, particularly in the TOD Districts
- Develop appropriate standards and guidelines for parking design and layout to support the type of development envisioned in each of Southcenter's districts.

Figure 29 – Landscaping in parking areas

- Factor pedestrian safety and convenience into parking lot design standards.
- Continue Commute Trip Reduction Programs and other Transportation Demand Management Programs. Incorporate the Growth Transportation Efficiency Center (GTEC) into transportation and land use planning in Southcenter

10.2.9 **Building Design.** Promote high quality, market feasible architecture in Southcenter, with attention to standards and guidelines which:

- Promote an appropriate display of scale and proportion;

- Give special attention to developing pedestrian-oriented features and streetfront activity areas such as ground floor windows, modulated building facades, rich details in material and signage;

- Provide quality landscape treatment;

- Provide an appropriate relationship to adjacent sites and features and;

e. Encourage overall building quality, and sensitivity to, and respect for, the area's important natural amenities such as the Green River and Tukwila Pond.

Include property owners in developing urban design guidelines to ensure that the intent of this policy is met.

10.2.10 **Signage.** Develop a directional sign program to aid pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists in wayfinding through Southcenter.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Identify appropriate design guidelines and locations for directional signage for shopping, access to amenities and leisure activities, in order to alleviate congestion in key corridors and intersections

10.2.11 **Parks, Open Space, and Public Amenities.** Support plans, policies, projects, and programs to expand and improve the parks, open space, and other amenities in Southcenter and seek opportunities to develop new facilities that enhance the overall experience of employees, residents, business owners, and visitors.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Design guidelines that ensure that uses and structures adjacent to parks recognize and complement open spaces and public amenities
- Prepare standards and guidelines for parks and open spaces that ensure access to sunlight, a sense of security, seating, landscaping, accessibility, and connections to surrounding uses and activities
- Develop strategies for public-private partnerships that will result in public open spaces to serve as focal points and settings for special events and activities
- Coordinate with Tukwila's Parks and Recreation Department to ensure that Southcenter's parks and open space needs are integrated into the Parks Plan.
- Encourage programs for open space and other public amenities *(Figure 30)*

Figure 30 – Envisioned Southcenter open space amenity

10.2.12 **Economic Development.** Actively promote development in Southcenter by supporting existing uses, identifying appropriate uses by district, developing design guidelines, improving existing and providing new amenities, adopting workable regulations, investing in public improvements; and proactively developing programs and incentives to attract new businesses, investing in infrastructure and public amenities, and encouraging business owners and developers to invest in the quality of both the built and natural environment.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Establish a lead redevelopment entity on the public side to coordinate implementation of an urban center redevelopment strategy and provide it with people, resources and tools to succeed.
- Rebrand urban center districts to take advantage of assets, location, and character, and reinforce land use concepts so that the image of Tukwila is refreshed.
- Support public/private partnerships to enhance existing and future business activity in Southcenter
- Improve infrastructure through the Capital Improvement Plan that reflects Southcenter policies
- Create distinct development standards for each district
- Prioritize the use of public investments to fund projects necessary to catalyze economic development.

Goal 10.3 Transportation and Circulation

A balanced transportation network that complements Southcenter land use and design policies and provides access for all transportation modes to, from, and within the center.

10.3.1 **Regional Access.** Promote transportation and transit services and facilities, as well as traffic management systems that increase and improve access to and from Southcenter for all transportation modes; encourage a range of solutions, including but not limited to local circulator systems, regional-serving park-n-ride sites, connections to regional rail alignments, and regional and local high-occupancy vehicle systems.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Implement alternative bus transit modes such as airport, hotel and rail station shuttles, and a local circulator service
- Work with transit providers to coordinate regional and local rail and transit systems, including bus rapid transit, commuter rail, light rail and monorail, that directly serve the urban center and facilitate access to alternative travel modes
- Develop, in conjunction with appropriate transit providers, additional transit facilities and routes in Southcenter
- Continue working with Sound Transit, the City of Renton, and the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Railroads to fund and complete the Strander Boulevard connection between the Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak Station and the City of Tukwila, including the pedestrian-only underpass beneath the Union Pacific lines.

10.3.2 **Local Access.** Support the development of a continuous, comprehensive public street network that serves all transportation needs, allows a range of travel route choices, and facilitates access within Southcenter for both motorized and non-motorized transportation modes.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Prepare and adopt a street and sidewalk system Master Plan
- Coordinate with land use planning efforts to ensure that improvements in the transportation and circulation system are parallel with projected growth and desired mode split in Southcenter
- A Capital Improvement Plan that reflects Southcenter policies
- Expansion of the street network
- Acquisition of rights-of-way for future street use
- Acquisition of railroad rights-of-way for pedestrian and bicycle paths
- Street and utility rights-of-way retention
- Develop auxiliary pedestrian ways to link major activity areas
- Streetscape Improvement Plan with distinct identities for major streets and strategies for pedestrian-oriented improvements and linkages such as new pathways, arcades, awnings, sidewalk eating areas, and special displays
- Conduct periodic traffic flow studies
- Development of connector streets and service streets
- Design intersections and sidewalks to promote pedestrian safety and foster walking as a viable mode of transportation
- Additional signalized pedestrian crossings

10.3.3 **Transit Service and Facilities.** In an effort to provide the greatest benefit to employees, business people, shoppers, visitors, and residents of Southcenter, promote the development and enhancement of transit service and facilities; coordinate with regional transit agencies to enhance existing and future bus and rail facilities; ensure consistency in planning between land use and transportation to create compatibility between motor vehicles, transit, and pedestrians.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- Work with regional transit providers to integrate the Tukwila Urban Center into the regional light rail network

10.3.4 **Transportation Alternatives.** Ensure that land use, urban design, and transportation and circulation actions for employees support and reinforce transportation alternatives, including the Commute Trip Reduction programs, Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs, Rideshare programs, and related projects and programs (i.e. parking provisions for alternative transportation modes).

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Support for businesses in implementing the Commute Trip Reduction Program and related transportation demand management programs
- Encourage alternative transportation modes
- Develop standards that complement and support alternative commutes such as bicycling and vanpools.

10.3.5 **Pedestrian Network.** Create a non-motorized transportation network by exploring the use of railroad rights-of-way as pedestrian paths; utilizing public/private funds to augment the existing network, and create connections between sites, within sites, and from building entrances to the street.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Public/private funds to augment the pedestrian network
- Implement the recommendations in the Walk and Roll Plan
- Development standards to augment the public and private pedestrian network and sidewalk and trail system
- Require safe, direct pedestrian connections from sidewalks to building entrances