



City of Tacoma
Planning and Development Services

**Agenda Item
D-1**

To: Planning Commission
From: Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division
Subject: **Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan and EIS**
Meeting Date: January 12, 2017
Memo Date: January 18, 2017

At the January 18th meeting the Commission will continue its review of the preliminary draft of the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan, with a focus on the vision, principles and implementation strategies for connectivity and the street/transportation network.

From the outset of this subarea planning effort the street network has been a major focus, primarily because parts of the Mall Neighborhood are characterized by large blocks without street connections. Moving toward a more connected street network is a core strategy for addressing the transportation demands of growth, making the transition from suburban to urban development patterns, strengthening the neighborhood's market position, and promoting livability. This conclusion has been borne out in the transportation, land use and economic development analyses, as well as through community engagement. However, making the transition from current conditions to a future with significant changes to the street network can be difficult to envision and has been a concern to current property owners who perceive proposed connectivity requirements as potential negative for their businesses.

In response to stakeholders' concerns about street network and connectivity and the Commissioners' suggestions to date, staff proposes that the meeting on January 18th be a facilitated exercise intended to reach agreement on one or more connectivity options to develop for inclusion in the public review draft of the Subarea Plan. The meeting will be structured as follows:

- Staff presentation on background, recommendations, and facilitated exercise approach
- Facilitated discussion of connectivity key issues
- Commission direction on next steps

Project information is available at www.tacomamallneighborhood.com. If you have any questions, please contact Elliott Barnett at (253) 591-5389, or email tacmallneighborhood@cityoftacoma.org.

Attachments:

1. Why Connectivity is Important (excerpts)
2. Benchmarking Summary
3. Facilitated Exercise Overview

c. Peter Huffman, Director

Why Connectivity is Important

The following is based on excerpts from the preliminary drafts of the Subarea Transportation Choices Chapter and the Transportation Chapter of the Draft EIS. This is provided to illustrate the intent of increasing connectivity within the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea.

Existing Street Network

The street grid in the transportation analysis area is generally characterized by long distances between through streets (large blocks) and a limited number of connections through the surrounding neighborhoods. Both of these attributes create bottlenecks for vehicles and make walking and biking trips more difficult by increasing their length and concentrating travel along high-traffic roads. Drivers tend to converge on a select few routes to reach their destinations, whether they are making local or regional trips. These streets include South Tacoma Way, South Pine Street/ South Oakes Street, Tacoma Mall Boulevard, South 38th Street, South 47th Street/South 48th Street and South 56th Street. These arterials also serve as important walking and biking routes to and from the Mall due to limited street network connectivity and barriers such as the Tacoma Mall and Tacoma Cemetery.

Current block sizes in the Subarea range from two to 27 acres (excluding the Mall itself). Typical historic block sizes in the Madison District, Downtown Tacoma and other neighborhoods are 4.5 acres in size. Block size ranges City-wide in older districts from 2.5 acres to 4.5 acres. Optimal typical “walkable urban blocks” are two to three acres in size. Areas with this block size have high “intersection density” (a regularized system of connected streets with four-way intersections). The finer grain of streets reduces walking times, improves connectivity and enlivens the neighborhood with increased access to businesses, residences and mixed use areas.

Proposed Street Network

A key outcome of the Subarea Plan is a change in how people travel. The transportation analysis shows that the denser street grid is important in reducing the vehicle trip generation and Vehicle Miles Travelled within the Mall Subarea by providing a more permeable network of streets for people to walk/bike to access destinations within the Mall Neighborhood and transit that extends to other portions of the region. Additionally, the street grid distributes traffic through different streets, reducing the concentration of vehicles that can result in congestion and poor LOS, and results in lower congestion at major intersections.

There is ample research documenting that dense, mixed-use areas with strong transit connections and a well-connected grid of pedestrian and bicycle paths result in less overall vehicular travel. Specific benefits include:

- Urban Form Benefits – Improving connectivity by breaking up large blocks and filling in missing sidewalk connections within the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood will result in benefits to the urban form. A more grid-like urban form with smaller blocks makes walking and bicycling more convenient and reduces the length of car trips by making for a less circuitous route. Increased intersection density provides network visibility choice and direct routes for all modes of travel.
- Improved connectivity and access creates value for individual properties. Based upon the assumption that visible street frontage is the most desirable location for mixed use and commercial development,

creation of smaller blocks from larger blocks produces a net yield of increased street parcel frontage to properties that is visible from streets. Interior pads or areas of large sites with limited street frontage typically command lower lease rates than visible sites with direct access. Increased access to sites also increases value.

- **Travel Behavior** – Denser development with a better diversity of uses and a pedestrian/bicycle friendly network will allow residents and employees to meet more of their daily needs within the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood rather than traveling by car to other locations. This results in fewer vehicle trips as well as shorter vehicle trips. Compared to existing conditions, implementation of the Subarea Plan would result in a 20 percent drop in SOV mode share, tripling of the pedestrian/bicycle mode share, and near doubling of the transit mode share. This change is the result of synergies between denser and more mixed land use patterns along with the supportive transportation plan identified in this chapter. Without action from the City to advance the Subarea Plan, even a modest amount of new development with the existing high SOV trip rate could result in substantial traffic congestion and would further hinder the development potential of the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood.
- **Health Benefits**— Providing alternative transportation and complete streets to connect diverse land uses throughout the neighborhood can promote physical health and social well-being, thus bringing in “free” health benefits. This Subarea Plan gives health a higher priority in transportation planning which would emphasize active transportation, injury reduction, public transit, and mobility management strategies, particularly those that increase non-motorized travel.
- **Environmental Benefits** – Fewer and shorter vehicle trips translates to lower VMT and in turn, lower greenhouse gas emissions. The reduction in single occupant vehicle trips and VMT described above provides the greenhouse gas emissions reduction benefits of planting more than 150,000 new trees. This directly aligns with the City’s sustainability goals.
- **Economic Development** – The proposed street network improves access to more properties. Increased property access and visibility will create value throughout the neighborhood, to individual properties, and cumulatively, to the district. As a district, the neighborhood will ultimately become more marketable and desirable as a place. Many demand management strategies can provide direct economic benefits, such as congestion reduction, facility cost savings, and vehicle cost savings. This is particularly true of locations near high-capacity transit stations, where reduced private car usage or ownership can makes housing more affordable.

Transportation Choices Chapter: Table T-1. Mode share (%)

Alternative	SOV	HOV	Walk/Bicycle	Transit	Internal Vehicle Trips
Existing	72%	8%	4%	5%	11%
Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Plan	52%	9%	12%	9%	18%

Other performance measures that could be used to evaluate the success of the project include volume-to-capacity ratios, intersection LOS, and system completeness.

TACOMA MALL NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN: CONNECTIVITY BENCHMARKING

Jurisdictions/Developments

	Typical Block Dimension/Intersection Distance-Density	Other Development Standards and Process	Thresholds	Market Conditions	Comments
Bel-Red (Bellevue)	300 feet by 300 feet (mapped)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedication of ROW and half street improvements ROW dedication and safety improvements <p>Connections determined through design review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full redevelopment Partial redevelopment <p>Minimal requirements for square footage increases less than 20% of building size</p>	Strong market conditions	Clear urban design framework Market conditions not comparable to Tacoma Light rail station Partially developer driven
Downtown Bellevue	600 feet by 600 feet	Connections (including pedestrian) determined through design review process	All development	Strong market conditions	Strong market conditions Viability strongly driven by strong economic environment
Puyallup	300 feet square up to 400 feet square (not mapped)	Site access required No pedestrian access required	\$150,000 improvement value	Moderate market conditions	Desire more strong pedestrian standards and required Tier 1.
Tigard Triangle District (Tigard, OR)	Every 660 feet (or 8 intersections/mile)	Bike and pedestrian connections required every 330 feet Work with Design Evaluation Team for design alternates	Parcels of one acre or larger must have an approved phased development plan	Strong market conditions	No mapped connections and very little clearly defined. Heavy design review and coordination components.
Tukwila Urban Center Plan	Varied (not mapped)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedication of ROW and construction of frontage Ask for ROW and minimum safety improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full redevelopment Partial redevelopment <p>Development sites with a block face that exceeds the maximum block face length standard must construct new public accessible streets</p>	Moderate-Strong market conditions	Lacks specificity, but ambitious TOD, urban center designations and presence of a lot of existing activity make project viable Strong reliance on PPP
Lacey Woodland District	Varied based on existing conditions and designation (mapped)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectivity Plan ROW dedication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$15k in improvements 75% of value/\$5 million/Full redevelopment 	Moderate market conditions	Relies on form-based code for implementation

Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan

Connectivity Facilitated Exercise Overview

January 18, 2017

The intent of this exercise is for the Commission to agree on one or more connectivity requirement options for further development and incorporation into the public review draft of the Subarea Plan.

Based on Commission input to date, staff have developed the following recommended modifications to the original draft Street Network and Connectivity Requirement concepts. These changes are intended to address property owner concerns while still making progress on connectivity goals through a flexible approach that defers determination of new street alignments until the point when major development occurs.

Staff Recommendations:

1. Confirm street network connectivity principles (see below)
2. Develop a mid-term (10 year) vision depicting improvements to existing rights-of-way and implementation of Tier 1 connections
3. Define Tier 1 connections as City-lead projects not subject to a Connectivity Requirement
4. Allow flexibility for future alignments of Tiers 2 and 3 connections, subject to connectivity performance standards (Tiers 2 and 3 would not be mapped)
5. Require a Connectivity Plan with mid-range development activities and dedication/construction of Tiers 2 and 3 connections with major development activities
6. Allow flexibility for site access and internal connectivity per Tacoma's design standards (more flexible than proposed Through-Block Connection requirement)
7. Pursue new funding tools to allow for proportional shared costs throughout the district
8. Offer further flexibility through Development Regulation Agreements with review criteria tailored to the Subarea Plan

Staff are seeking direction on the above recommendations. In addition, there are several issues for which further Commission direction is needed. These will be the focus of the facilitated exercise.

Description of Connectivity Exercise

The facilitated Planning Commission exercise offers the opportunity for the Planning Commission to consider and weigh in on *options* for several significant considerations which will further shape the connectivity approach. This exercise will provide the Commission and public to view a visual array of options for each connectivity element and Planning Commission preferences.

As part of the exercise, the Commission will be given options for each of the following topics.

1. Connectivity Plan requirement threshold
2. Dedication and construction thresholds
3. Loop Road Northwest Quadrant alignment options (see attached)
4. Street Network Tiers 2 and 3 concepts, alignment flexibility and ownership
5. Design standards and flexibility
6. Funding

Proposed Connectivity Principles

City actions to establish new street network connectivity shall be governed by the following Connectivity Principles:

- Accommodate growth and support Subarea transportation, urban form and land use goals
- Build on and integrate with existing street and pedestrian patterns
- Seek to achieve multiple benefits
- Support existing businesses by avoiding requirements that make it overly costly to operate, improve and expand to a reasonable extent
- Balance predictability and flexibility in determining future street connections
- Share costs proportionally with the benefits at the Subarea, quadrant and site levels
- Avoid or compensate for disproportional impacts
- Design new connections per complete streets principles to support the planned future uses, travel modes and traffic volumes
- Allow design flexibility for local access (Tier 3) connections
- Reflect nexus and proportionality land use legal principles

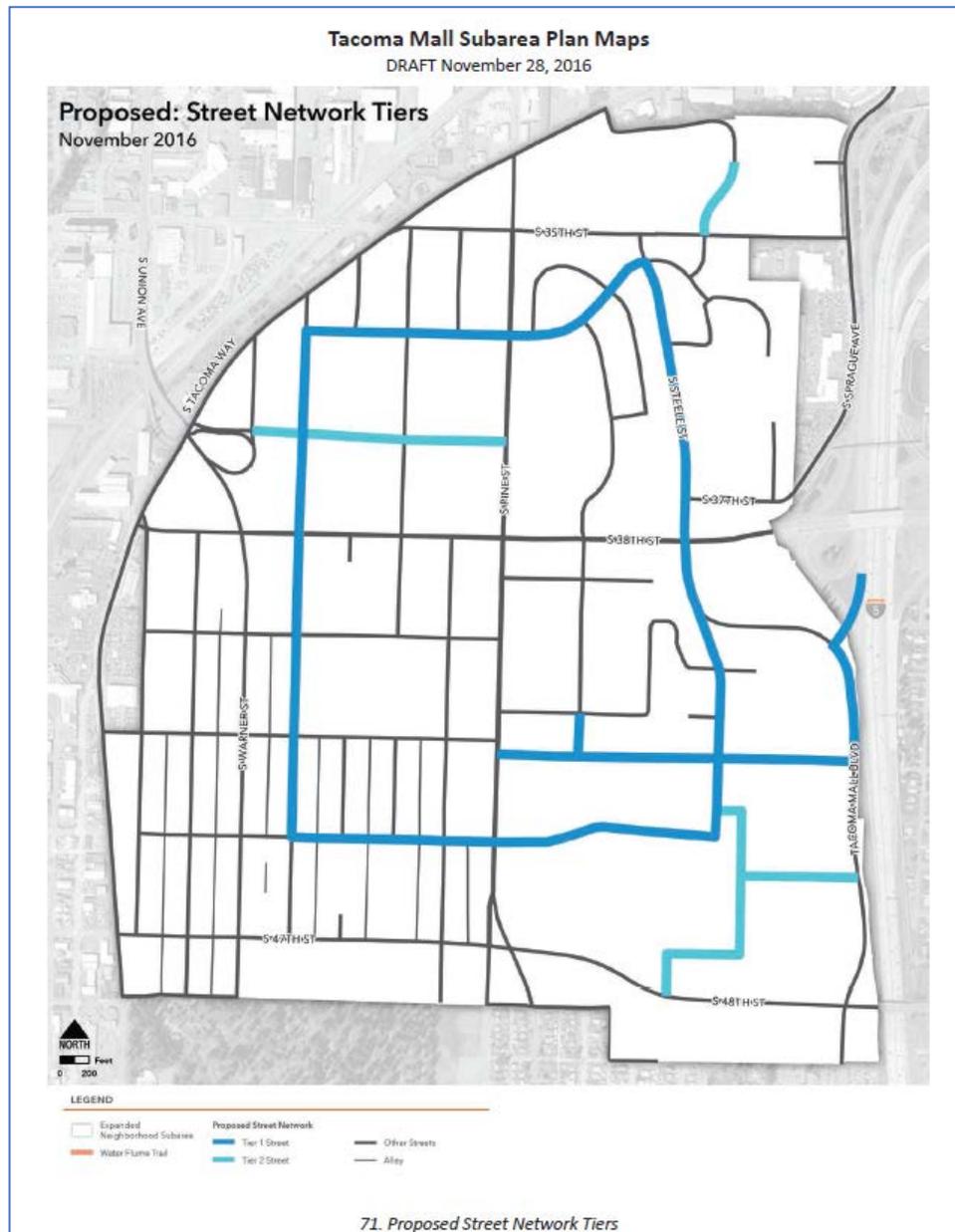
Proposed Street Network Tiers

In association with the transportation analysis the City identified three tiers of proposed new street network connections. We are including this as background for the Connectivity Exercise:

Tier 1 - Critical transportation projects: Connections for which the specific design and location are critical to the network

Tier 2 – Establishing the urban grid: Connections which create alternative routes to existing major arterials and establish urban “super blocks” at approximately 600 by 600 feet

Tier 3 – Site access, urban design and mode shift: Connections which achieve site access, system connectivity and promote transportation mode shift (these connections are not mapped)



Loop Road Northwest Quadrant alignment options

As part of the Connectivity Exercise the Commission will discuss which Loop Road alignment options to include in the public review draft.

Proposed Loop Road principles:

- Includes common specific features for the four character district segments
- Functions as a linear public green space
- Links the four districts
- Links future parks in each district
- Includes trees and green stormwater infrastructure
- Minimizes location on steep slopes to promote walkability for people of all abilities
- Includes the potential for festival street sections
- Supports community and economic goals and
- Supports multimodal mobility

