



July 5, 2019

Arthur Babitz, Chair Hood River Planning Commission  
Kevin, Liburdy, Planner Westside Concept Plan  
City of Hood River  
211 2nd Street  
Hood River, OR 97031

Dear Arthur & Kevin

This is a formal letter as follow up to CAT's testimony at the Hood River Planning Commission Meeting on Monday July 1<sup>st</sup>. CAT is pleased to have the opportunity to work with you, the Planning Commission and others at City Hall on the Westside Plan. We believe the Westside Concept Plan is a positive step toward improved livability. As noted, we believe the land use, street, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity plans outline in the Concept Plan today along with the Hood River Transportation System Plan would provide us the minimum necessary for CAT to run transit service in the area as it develops. The question for the Commission and Council is the providing for the minimum for transit enough for the goals you have set out in this plan?

As I mentioned, the CAT Board has been pursuing a progressive fixed-route strategy for transit services within Hood River, the County and beyond. This strategy has met many of the initial goals outlined in the Transit Master Plan, the City's own goals for alternative transportation and the goals identified in the Hood River County Energy Plan. As new resources have become available the CAT Board is moving forward to close identified gaps in the transit network. In an effort to ensure success with these plans and investments, CAT is looking to increase ridership and strengthen its partnership with the City and other stakeholders around transit.

Our comments below are intended to reflect this interest and offer you a set of strategies that would better meet the City's access, mobility, livability, housing and economic development goals. While these comments are specific to the Westside plan, it is our intent to have CAT and City transportation goals at the forefront of all our interactions with the City, so that we can work together to leverage our limited resources to jointly meet the long-term goals and visions of the broader community.

To that end, our comments today are premeditated to ensure that future transit investments (both service and infrastructure) are aligned with the City's goals and visions to make Westside a "livable" mixed use, lively, walkable place that can foster and facilitate transit use and local access.

In general, we are asking the City to include four key concepts into the Westside Plan:

1. Transit Friendly Streets
2. Transit Stops
3. Transit Gateways
4. Transit Supportive Development

## ***Transit Friendly Streets***

Transit friendly streets involve “balancing” street users rather than having any single mode dominate, thereby achieving equilibrium among the various transport modes: bus, car, bicycle and pedestrian.

*The streets within the Westside Plan area that have potential as transit streets include the following:*

- *Cascade Avenue between Mount Adams and Downtown*
- *Rand Road – between Wasco and Belmont Street*
- *May Street – between Frankton and 12<sup>th</sup>*
- *Belmont Street between 30<sup>th</sup> – and 12<sup>th</sup> Street and the*
- *new Mount Adams Road*



Transit Friendly Streets require that forethought is given to stops, turning movements and access for transit vehicles and coordination with other modes of transportation. They are designed to ensure that the community has access to transit and transit vehicles can move through the area without barriers.

## ***Transit Stops***

Bus stops are a critical part of the transit system as they serve as the first point of contact between the transit patron and fixed route transit system. In addition, bus stop placement throughout the community acts to market and promote transit. These visual cues allow the public and surrounding businesses to know public transit is available and is there to serve the entire community.



Bus stop spacing, location and design all affect the operation of the transit system and, in turn, the transit patron’s overall experience of transit. It must be noted that transit stops are more than just a place to identify transit and wait for a bus. Appropriately located, designed and managed bus stops are an opportunity to improve transit performance and to enhance the perception of the street with green infrastructure and small public spaces.

Transit stops fit into a broader setting involving transit vehicles and intersection operations. While the location of a stop determines to a large extent how transit patrons gain access to transit service, the design and configuration of bus stops and transfer points impacts how all street users interact with the transit system. Bus stop placement can work on main streets to slow traffic – through techniques like bus bump outs (bus bulbs); near side stops or other techniques that decrease walking distance (and time) for pedestrians crossing the street, provides better sight lines to bus patrons waiting for the bus and requires car drivers to use more caution as they move through an area. In other instances, bus

stop placement can foster safety of pedestrians as they cross busy traffic – through techniques like bus pull outs or far side stops that are coupled with designated or signalized crosswalks.

### ***Transit Gateways***

Transit Gateways are stops that celebrate transit. They can be as grand as a plaza that is integrated into a street or site design or just a planned intersection bump out that extends the curb to the travel lane, In each case the gateway plaza or intersection bump out provides additional sidewalk area for bus patrons to wait, maintains pedestrian flows on the sidewalk, increases transit visibility and performance, and provides additional space for amenities, including bus shelters and kiosks.



Near major trip generators (such as employment centers, residential areas, community centers, retail centers, educational and medical facilities) are ideal areas for Transit Gateways stops and when combined with storefronts, streetscaping, and public amenities, enhance transit access and the public realm.



*Our recommendation is to identify 6 intersections within the plan area as transit gateway stops including:*

- *Rand & Sherman Street*
- *Rand & May Street*
- *Rand & Belmont Street*
- *30<sup>th</sup> & May street*
- *Mount Adams & Cascade Avenue*
- *Cascade Avenue & Rand Road*
- *Frankton & May*

### ***Transit Supportive Development***

Public transit tends to be particularly successful in communities that have defined walkable centers, offering multiple attractions and reasons for pedestrians to frequent the area. A sense of place is projected by having a combination of density, mixed uses, pedestrian orientation, and design elements to treat each as a unique community center with its own identity.

**Centers** are compact, mixed use, walkable and pedestrian-oriented radiating outward (¼ to ½ mile) from a public park plaza, transit stop: a focus for community activity, dining, living, working, shopping, services, etc..

**Corridors**, like centers above are active major streets along a bus line – with a mix of eateries, housing, offices, parks, pedestrian plazas, retail and services (similar to 12<sup>th</sup> / 13<sup>th</sup> Street), specifically arranged to encourage and facilitate transit use.

The design principles which define the essential characteristics of these 6 centers and 4 transit friendly streets and would be incorporated in Concept Plan refinement include:

- Greater density than community average
- A mix of uses
- Quality pedestrian environment
- Defined public realm.



These four principles directly influence the land use, circulation, and design elements as well as the code regulatory elements that support it. A common thread running through the above guiding principles is the importance of establishing a unique neighborhood identity that is memorable and focused to promote and facilitate transit use. Improvements in public spaces, ranging from civic buildings, plazas, and streets to street signs, light fixtures and standards, specific street tree species, and pedestrian area paving materials can be used to create a unique sense of place for each priority

street or center. The intent with these principles is to develop the surround community character through the implementation of specific design palettes that are unique to the locality and enhance ridership and access.

## **1. Greater Density than the Community Average**

The following elements contribute to appropriate density for transit-supportive land uses:

- Densities higher than the community norm are located within  $\frac{1}{4}$  of transit plaza stop.
- Parking facilitates the development but does not take on a priority focal point for the project or community.
- Site design for major projects allows for the intensification of development over time. intensification of densities over time.
- Development incentives (parking reductions, density bonuses, etc.) are offered during the development phase to facilitate the type of development that is needed and wanted in the location.

## **2. A Mix of Uses**

A mix of uses is required to create multiple destinations around the transit stop or plaza, which helps to generate pedestrian traffic. An active, lively environment can change the perception of distances, making destinations seem shorter and more walkable. A transit-supportive environment includes a mixture of residential, commercial, service, employment, and public uses making many trips between destinations shorter and more walkable. Adjacent to transit priority streets or transit nodes this is facilitated through

- Density and buildings are highest in the core near the transit stop, moderating somewhat in the center that is within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of the transit station, and ultimately transitioning down to match the character of surrounding development,
- Buildings are located closer to the street and are typically taller than the surrounding area.
- Buildings are primarily oriented to the street with windows and main entrances.

- Parking is less predominant, being located to the rear and in future parking structures.
- Parking requirements are reduced in close proximity to transit, compared to the norm.
- Sidewalks are wider than in lower density areas, and offer pedestrian amenities, such as street trees, benches, kiosks, and plazas.

### **3. Quality Pedestrian Environment**

One of the most visually distinguishable features of a transit-oriented area is the active streetscape, which is oriented towards pedestrians. Vibrant communities, with or without transit, are always convenient and comfortable places for pedestrians. What is critical is that the development and transit are linked and that it is convenient and safe for pedestrians to move throughout the community.

There are a number of components that contribute to a quality pedestrian environment:

- Buildings and primary entrances are sited and oriented to be easily accessible from the street.
- Buildings incorporate architectural features that convey a sense of place and relate to the street and the pedestrian environment.
- Amenities, such as storefront windows, awnings, architectural features, lighting, and landscaping, are
- provided to help create a comfortable pedestrian environment along and between buildings.
- The site layout and building design allow direct pedestrian movements between transit, mixed land uses, and surrounding areas.
- Most of the parking is located to the side or to the rear of the buildings.
- Sidewalks are present along site frontages, which connect to sidewalks and streets on adjacent and nearby properties.
- Pedestrian routes are buffered from fast-moving traffic and expanses of parking.
- Trees sheltering streets and sidewalks are provided along with pedestrian-scale lighting.
- Secure and convenient bicycle parking is provided.

### **4. Public Realm**

Transit is particularly successful in communities and neighborhoods that have a defined public realm that is oriented around transit. The public realm may be a transit plaza that offers multiple attractions and reasons for pedestrians to frequent the area or a public building (like a library) that brings the surrounding community to the area for interaction

- Key elements of a public space include plaza or sidewalk width that allow for social activity;
- A mix of uses generating pedestrian traffic and lingering movement is concentrated around the node
- Art and play areas (for children & adults) encourage slower movement and allow for outdoor seating and social engagement.
- Auto-oriented uses, such as service stations and drive through facilities, are limited or prohibited adjacent to the transit priority streets or transit plaza.
- Transit information and transfers between buses are accommodated.