

Introduction 1



Introduction

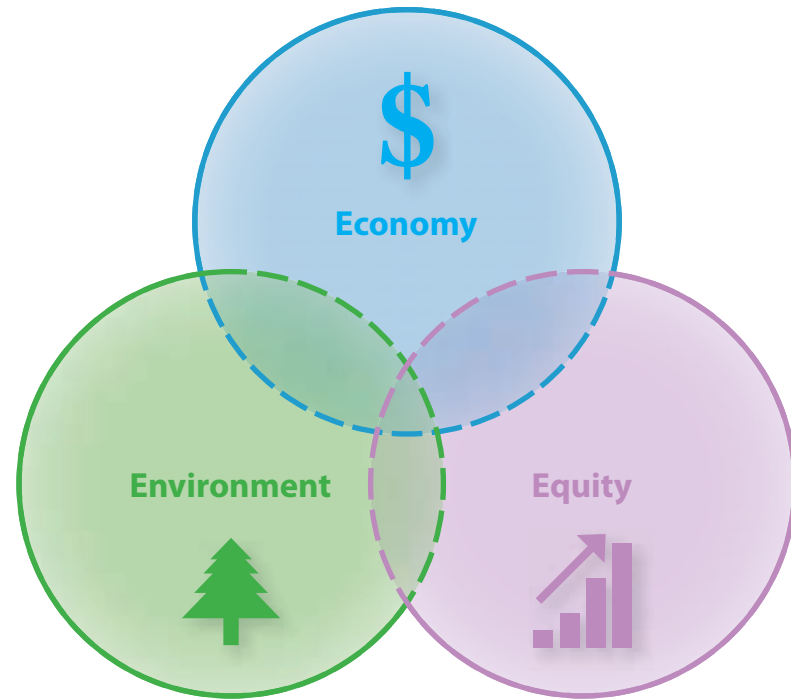
"The goal is a more sustainable California – environmentally, socially, and economically."

California Strategic Growth Council 2010 Annual Report

Santa Cruz County is beginning an exciting new project: The Transit Corridors Plan for Sustainable Communities. This Plan, referred to as the Transit Corridors Plan, will establish a community-based vision for a more sustainable way of life in the urban areas of unincorporated Santa Cruz County, focusing on Live Oak, Soquel, and Aptos. The Plan will integrate the County's land use and transportation policies in a way that protects environmental resources, supports economic growth and fiscal health, and increases access to opportunity for all County residents.

The Transit Corridors Plan, guided by the requirements of the grant funding source, aims to promote a concept of sustainability with three related components: environment, economy, and equity. In so doing, the Plan will address some of the critical questions of our day, including:

- How can we provide housing that is affordable for all county residents?
- How can our development patterns and transportation choices help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
- How can we increase transportation alternatives and reduce reliance on the automobile?



The Three E's of Sustainability

Transit Corridors Plan Goals

The goal of the Transit Corridors Plan is to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Increase affordable housing
- Increase transportation alternatives
- Increase access to good jobs
- Identify and enhance gateways through good urban design



Historic Congregational Church in Soquel (top) and Apple Barn in Aptos (bottom).

- How can we increase the supply of good jobs available to county residents?
- How can we ensure that all residents benefit from economic growth and development?
- How can we ensure the fiscal health of governmental agencies so that adequate services are available to protect the public health, safety, and welfare?
- How can all residents have a voice in the future of their communities?

The Transit Corridors Plan will reflect the unique identity, values, and goals of Santa Cruz County residents. The Plan will be prepared through an open and inclusive process, including community workshops, the project Advisory Group, and public stakeholder interviews. The Plan will establish a new vision for a development pattern that enhances residents' quality of life, expands choices, and promotes prosperity for generations to come.

PLAN AREA

The Transit Corridors Plan area is part of a larger regional setting that will influence future growth and development within Santa Cruz County. As shown in Figure I-1, the Plan area is within close proximity to the economic engine of Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area. Immediately to the west is the City of Santa Cruz, home to the University of California, Santa Cruz. The Plan area surrounds the City of Capitola and Capitola Mall, and the City of Watsonville is approximately 10 miles to the east.

Figure I-1: Regional Context



- Santa Cruz County Boundary
- Plan Area
- Highway

What is a Transit Corridor?

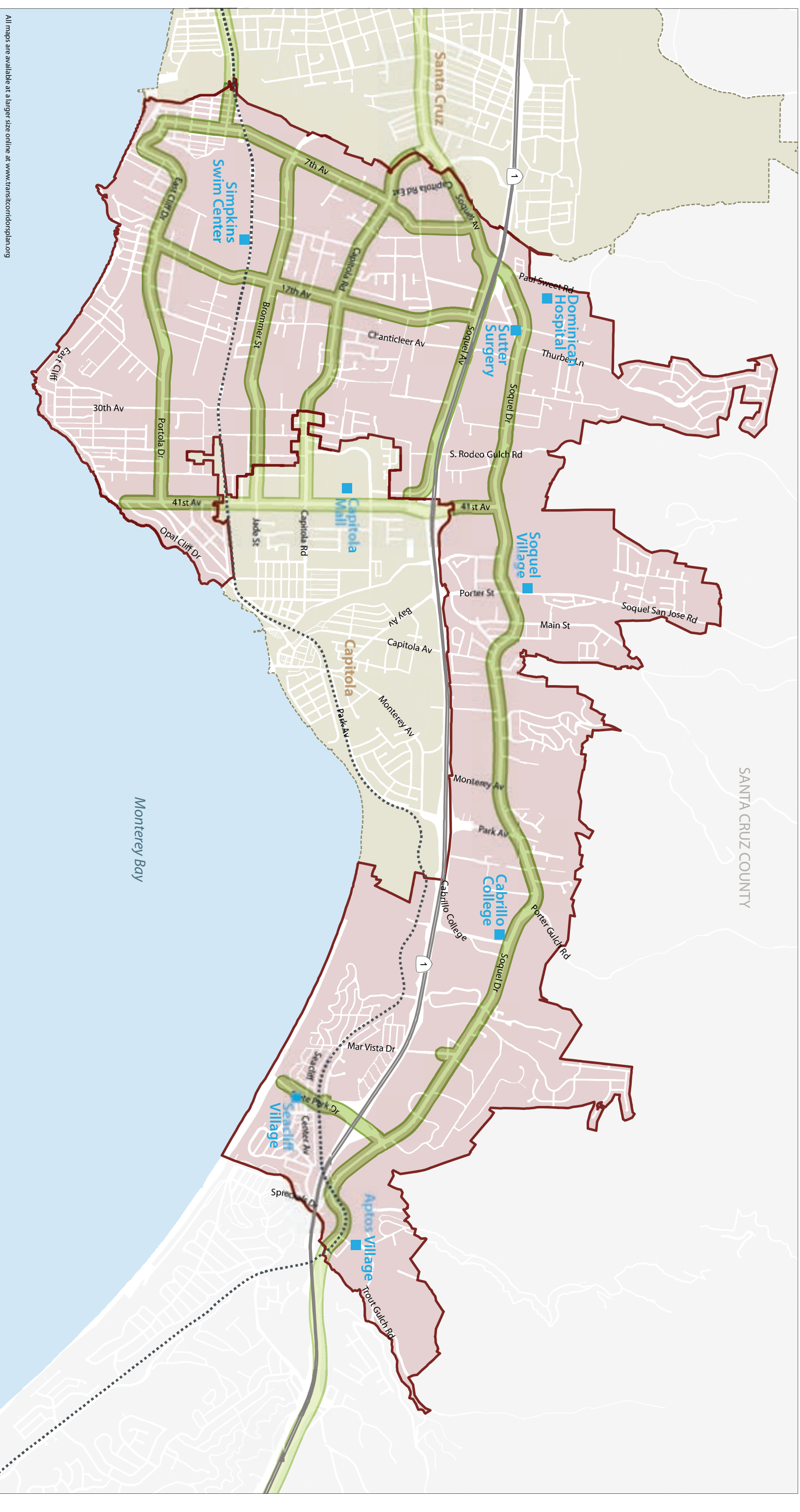
The term “transit corridor” refers to places where the pattern of development supports alternative forms of transportation, including public transit, biking, and walking. A transit corridor contains a sufficient density of development to support high quality transit service, and a diversity of land uses to encourage walking and biking to destinations. A transit corridor is also well connected to regional employment centers, and possesses urban design characteristics that are safe and attractive for pedestrians. Transit corridors provide opportunities for communities to increase housing choices, strengthen the local economy, and protect important environmental resources.



Figure I-2 shows the specific boundaries of the area to be studied in greater depth as part of the Transit Corridors Plan. The Plan area includes the portions of Live Oak, Soquel, and more densely populated areas of Aptos that are within the County’s Urban Service Line. The Urban Service Line was first designated in the early 1980s and indicates the area with an urban level of service such as public water and sewer service.

Dominican Hospital (top right) Seacliff Village (bottom right) and Cabrillo College (bottom left) are all located within the Plan Area.

Figure I-2: Project Area



This page is intentionally blank

Soquel Drive is the primary transit corridor connecting the Plan area to Highway 1, the City of Santa Cruz, and Watsonville. Other corridors include Soquel Avenue fronting Highway 1, and the major arterial streets in Live Oak. The Plan area contains the Dominican and Sutter medical centers, Cabrillo College, numerous public schools, and the Soquel, Aptos, and Seacliff village centers.

The Transit Corridors Plan will apply to the portion of unincorporated Santa Cruz County with the greatest potential to accommodate more sustainable development patterns. This area has the highest existing concentration of jobs and housing within unincorporated Santa Cruz County, the strongest connections to regional employment centers, and the most extensive transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. The Plan area represents the County's best opportunity to contribute to a new regional transportation and land use framework that prioritizes sustainable outcomes for the local economy and county residents.

WORK PROGRAM AND SCHEDULE

The Transit Corridors Plan will take approximately three years to complete. It is anticipated that final review of the Plan by the Board of Supervisors will occur in late 2014. An estimated schedule for the completion of key tasks is as follows:

Existing Conditions (September 2012)

The first task focuses on the review of background materials and analyzing existing conditions relevant to the Transit Corridors Plan. This Existing Conditions Report is the culmination of this task.



Neighborhood-serving retail use in Live Oak.

Vision and Guiding Principles (October 2012)

Based on public input obtained from a variety of methods, including workshops, meetings, the website, and stakeholder interviews, the project team will prepare a Vision Statement, Goals, and Policy Framework for the Transit Corridors Plan. This product will articulate guiding principles for the Plan and will provide a foundation for the preparation of Plan components.

Alternatives for Focus Areas (January 2013)

The project team will prepare alternative development scenarios for focus areas along the County's transit corridors and key opportunity sites. Focus areas are the places within the transit corridors where land use changes and transportation improvements can best promote project objectives. The alternatives will address land uses, urban design, economic development, natural resource protection, and transportation enhancements to promote sustainable communities within Santa Cruz County.

Preferred Concept Plan (October 2013)

The project team will use public input on the focus area alternatives to prepare one or more Plan concept diagrams that illustrate the preferred land use, urban design, and circulation concepts for the focus areas. The concept plans will be highly graphic and focus on the urban design characteristics of envisioned new development and transportation infrastructure.

Development Regulations and Implementation Programs (December 2013)

Following the preparation of the preferred concept plan, the project team will work with the public to prepare development regulations and programs to implement the plan concept. Amendments to the County's Planning and Zoning Regulations will be prepared that focus on building and site design, permitted land uses, and parking requirements.

Draft Plan (August 2014)

The project team will assemble materials prepared as part of prior tasks into a Draft Transit Corridors Plan for Santa Cruz County. The Plan will present a vision for more sustainable land use and transportation patterns in the County that protects the environment, supports economic development and fiscal health, and promotes social equity.

Final Proposed Plan (November 2014)

After public input on the Draft Plan, the Board of Supervisors will review a Final Proposal Plan that addresses issues raised during the public review period. Prior to adoption of a Final Plan by the Board of Supervisors, the Plan will be reviewed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Public Review and Input

There will be a variety of opportunities for the public to participate in the Transit Corridors Plan. One unique opportunity is Open Town Hall, an online comment forum for the Plan intended to supplement more traditional public participation methods. Open Town

Hall can be accessed through the project website, www.transitcorridorsplan.org. Additional opportunities for public participation include:

- Advisory Group Meetings (7). The Advisory Group consists of over 20 citizens representing neighborhoods, businesses, educational institutions, environmental groups, and other groups in the county.
- Stakeholder Interviews (7). Interviews will be held with key stakeholder groups to explore critical issues in an in-depth manner.
- Focus Group Roundtables (4). Groups of residents will be brought together to provide feedback on ideas and concepts for the Plan.
- Community Workshops (at least 4). All county residents will be invited to participate in interactive workshops to provide input on the Plan.
- Planning Commission Study Sessions (4)
- Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors Hearings (4)
- Ad Hoc Community Meetings (As Needed)

Dates and location for all public meetings and workshops, as well as reports, meeting notes and summaries, are posted on the project website. Interested parties may sign up with their email address on the project website to receive email notifications about future meetings and the progress of the Plan.

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report describes existing conditions within the Transit Corridors Plan area and highlights key issues and questions related to the project objectives. This report is intended to provide the public with a shared set of baseline facts to allow for an informed discussion of options for the Plan area. Each chapter of this report presents existing conditions through maps, tables, and text, and then concludes with a summary of key issues and questions related to the chapter topic. This report does not present recommendations for the Plan – these will be developed following public input.

The remaining chapters of this report address the following topics:

- Land Use
- Urban Design
- Population and Housing
- Economics
- Natural Environment
- Transportation
- Economic Vitality and Fiscal Health