

Information Item

Land Use Advisory Committee



Meeting Date: July 18, 2024

Topic

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Residential Densities

District(s), Member(s): ALL

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.175

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Division/Department: Community Development/Regional Planning

Background

At the meeting on July 18th, Committee members will review TOD Density policy from Thrive MSP 2040 (Thrive) and the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). Thrive identified minimum required and target densities for new development around transit stations. Density thresholds varied by mode and community designation, recognizing the variety of land use contexts across the regional transit system.

Light Rail Transit (LRT), Commuter Rail, Dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Highway BRT represent the highest level of regional investment in transit. As a result, policy expectations for residential density levels of activity are highest for their station areas. In response to regional policy, local comprehensive plans had to identify not only the route and station locations, but also the geography of station areas. These requirements applied to existing transitways, transitways under construction, and transitways where the locations of future stations were finalized.

The Average Minimum Density and Recommended Target Density information below reflect the 2040 policies as identified in the [Local Planning Handbook](#) and the [Transportation Policy Plan](#).

Average Minimum Density

Table 1 below identifies the guidance in the 2040 TPP where communities were required to plan for minimum residential densities consistent with the type of transit and their community designation.

Table 1. Average Minimum Residential Density Requirements (dwelling units per acre)

Right-of-Way Type	Transit Type	Geography	Urban Center	Urban	Suburban	Suburban Edge / Emerging Suburban Edge
Fixed or Dedicated Transitway	Light Rail Transit	half-mile radius	50	25	20	15
	Commuter Rail Dedicated BRT					
Highway Transitway (MnPass / HOV)	Highway BRT	half-mile radius	25	12	10	8
Shared Rights-of-Way	Arterial BRT	quarter-mile radius	15	15	15	15
	Local Bus Routes on High Frequency Network	quarter-mile along route	10	10	10	10

Recommended Target Density

The 2040 TPP also identified target densities that best support transit, as shown in Table 2 below. The intention of the target densities were to encourage communities to explore opportunities to guide land at these higher densities, or to consider scenarios where this level of density might be possible or desirable.

Table 2. Target Residential Densities (dwelling units per acre)

Right-of-Way Type	Transit Type	Geography	Urban Center	Urban	Suburban	Suburban Edge / Emerging Suburban Edge
Fixed or Dedicated Transitway	Light Rail Transit Commuter Rail Dedicated BRT	half-mile radius	75-150+	50-100+	40-75+	40-75+
Highway Transitway (MnPass / HOV)	Highway BRT	half-mile radius	40-75+	25-50+	20-40+	20-40+
Shared Rights-of-Way	Arterial BRT	quarter-mile radius	20-60+	20-60+	20-60+	20-60+
	Local Bus Routes on High Frequency Network	quarter-mile along route	15-60+	15-60+	15-60+	15-60+

Imagine 2050 TOD Residential Density options

As part of the density analysis for Imagine 2050, updated TOD policies including residential density minimums are necessary. The average transit densities around station areas provided flexibility for communities to plan where higher and lower densities would occur while still meeting the minimum required threshold.

A recent review of residential building permit data for new development in transit stations areas across the region between 2009 and 2023 shows that on average the market is exceeding the 2040 policy minimum required densities and developing at and above the minimum target densities. Developed densities around most transit stations are averaging 30-40 units/acre with the exception of significantly higher densities for some Urban Center stations and somewhat lower densities for Commuter Rail in the Suburban and Suburban Edge. Overall, the market recognizes that station areas are a smart investment for residential projects and provide one of the best opportunities for compact development within communities.

For Imagine 2050, the following approaches could be considered:

- Shift residential density thresholds for station areas upward toward the current target minimums which are already being achieved and exceeded by development in many instances.
- Simplify the transit density thresholds to identify minimum required densities only, with no targets.
- Consolidate some of the variation between modes and community type.
- Maintain Thrive TOD density policies and make no changes.
- Other ideas that might be suggested.

Discussion Questions

For the meeting, please consider the following questions:

- Does increasing the minimum required residential densities make sense?
- What are the most important considerations for identifying new minimums?
- Do the target densities serve an important purpose and should be retained?



The map below illustrates the region's transitways with station area average minimum densities for new residential development reflective of current Thrive requirements.

