

Unlocking Smart Growth: The Effects of Proposed Transit-Oriented Development Laws on the Puget Sound Region

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Abstract

During the 2024 legislative session in Washington State, two bills were introduced in both the House and the Senate aimed at promoting community and transit-oriented housing development. These bills, HB 2160 and SB 6024, propose mandating cities to permit developments of a specific scale within certain distances from high-capacity transit stops. This study evaluates the extent to which the proposed increases in development capacity under these bills exceed current allowances. The findings indicate a substantial enhancement in development potential for the majority of areas within walking distance of transit stops. Specifically, for land that is developable and presently zoned for lower development capacity than what the bills propose, the average increase in capacity is projected to be +1.35 in terms of floor area ratio (FAR).

Plain Language Summary

In 2024, the Washington State Legislature considered two new laws aimed at making it easier to build homes near public transit areas, like light rail stations and bus rapid transit stops. These laws would require cities to allow taller, denser buildings in these areas. Our study looked at how much more development could happen under these new laws compared to what's currently allowed. We found that, if these laws pass, there would be a lot more room for building new homes and apartments near transit stops.

About Futurewise



Futurewise is a nonprofit organization that works throughout Washington State on the implementation of the Growth Management Act (GMA). We partner with local communities to support land use policies that encourage healthy, equitable and opportunity-rich communities, and that protect our most valuable farmlands, forests and water resources. We have members across the state including the central Puget Sound region. For more information about our organization, visit our website at <https://futurewise.org/>.

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1 Introduction



Figure 1: Central Puget Sound | Photo courtesy of Clemens Vasters from Viersen, Germany, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

45 The Puget Sound metropolitan region is one of North America’s major growth
 46 centers for people, jobs, and housing. Between 2010 and 2023, the central Puget
 47 Sound’s four-county region (King, Snohomish, Pierce, and Kitsap) added more resi-
 48 dents and housing units than the rest of Washington state combined.¹

2 Data & Methods

3 Results

4 Discussion

5 Conclusion

References

¹ The source of these statistics are the author’s analysis of postcensal estimates by the Washington State Office of Financial Management. The central Puget Sound population grew by 414,400 people between 2010 and 2023, while the rest of the state’s population grew by 84,300 people. During the same period, 276,177 housing units were added in the this region, while 179,786 units were created elsewhere in the state.