

Oregon Greenhouse Gas Reduction Toolkit:  
**Strategy Report**  
OREGON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE



## Public Offices Downtown

*This report describes how policies to encourage public offices to locate in downtowns and other compact, central areas can help achieve greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals while achieving other community goals such as a vibrant downtown.*



MANAGE PARKING



SUPPORT DOWNTOWNS  
AND MIXED-USE AREAS



SPUR ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT



INCREASE  
TRANSIT USE

### What is it?

Public agencies tend to employ many people and/or attract many customers and visitors. Strategically locating public offices helps reduce GHG emissions by fostering walking, biking and use of transit, and by encouraging an environment conducive to “parking once” for multiple errands. In addition, it can help achieve other community goals such as economic vitality by providing a customer base for downtown businesses and minimizing the need for employees to travel by car to access food and other services. Locating public buildings downtown improves access to services for people who do not drive and helps minimize high per square foot infrastructure costs associated with sprawling land use patterns. This strategy is especially useful when combined with transit service, a good biking and walking network, and parking management. Tools to attract public agencies to locate their offices downtown can include a supportive policy framework, financial and parking incentives, and development code provisions.

In 1994, the State of Oregon adopted a policy that requires state agencies to give first priority for new building sites to properties located within a central business core with nearby transit<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Governor Kulongoski issued an executive order in 2010 directing state agencies to locate downtown, and in historic buildings, whenever possible.<sup>2</sup>

### How well does it work?

There is little data available to estimate the possible greenhouse gas reductions associated with locating public agencies downtown. The Moving Cooler<sup>3</sup> analysis identifies an integrated set of land use strategies that includes locating public offices downtown. It estimates a 0.2 to 2.1 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050 based on the assumption that roughly half of new urban development uses the combined strategies that were evaluated. The analysis also notes that these strategies can take some time to implement and the benefits accrue slowly. However, “the effects of land use changes can be expected to endure many years beyond 2050”. In addition, the Cool Planning Handbook<sup>4</sup> notes that, “one of the most effective ways to curb greenhouse gases is for communities to focus new development into centers.”

1 Office of the Governor, State of Oregon. Executive Order No. EO-94-07: Siting State Offices in Oregon’s Community Centers. June 1994. Website: [http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/EAM/docs/1256115\\_execorder\\_94\\_07.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/EAM/docs/1256115_execorder_94_07.pdf)

2 Office of the Governor, State of Oregon. Executive Order No. EO-10-01: Preserving and Enhancing Oregon’s Historic Downtowns. January 2010. Website: [http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive\\_orders/eo\\_1001.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive_orders/eo_1001.pdf)

3 Moving Cooler: An Analysis of Transportation Strategies for Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Cambridge Systematics, Inc. Urban Land Institute, July 2009.

4 Cool Planning: A Handbook on Local Strategies to Slow Climate Change. Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program. 2012. Website: <http://www.oregon.gov/LCD/TGM/docs/coolplanninghandbook1312011.pdf>

## How can it benefit my community?

In addition to reducing GHG emissions, this strategy is associated with several other community benefits, including:

- » Economic support for downtown retail and service businesses
- » Cost savings resulting from more efficient use of existing infrastructure and avoidance of sprawling land use patterns
- » The walking and biking opportunities that are associated with compact downtowns can help improve public health
- » Cost savings through reduced travel time and distances, and by promoting alternate modes of transportation
- » Convenience for customers and employees of locating public services close to retail and housing
- » Support for shared parking lots and structures
- » Support for transit use by creating an activity hub



## What does it cost?

Implementation of policies to encourage public agencies to locate downtown is supported by the state executive orders, which provide a framework that can be built upon by local governments. Steps to implement this strategy may include creation of new policy language and supportive development code provisions, implementation of new incentive programs, and direct marketing and outreach to local government agencies to coordinate and identify mutually beneficial arrangements. While policy and code changes can be done relatively quickly (one to two years), it may take longer for new public agencies to locate downtown and, therefore, to realize the community benefits associated with this strategy.

## Where has it been used?

- » **The City of Hillsboro** completed its new civic center and city hall complex in the center of downtown in 2005, just one block from a light rail transit station. In addition to the city offices, the complex includes residential units, public plazas and commercial retail space. The public plazas serve as amphitheater space for events and have public fountains. More information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillsboro\\_Civic\\_Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillsboro_Civic_Center)
- » **Fairview Village**, a small town located about 15 miles outside of Portland, was designed with a focus on the city center. The city hall, public library and post office are all located in the community center and surrounded by a convenient biking and walking network. Two bus lines serve the town center and provide direct access to the regional light rail system. More information: <http://www.fairviewvillage.com/story.html>

## Where can I learn more?

- » Community Investment Toolkit: Financial Incentives. Metro, June 2007. Website: [http://library.oregonmetro.gov/files/financial\\_incentives\\_toolkit\\_final.pdf](http://library.oregonmetro.gov/files/financial_incentives_toolkit_final.pdf)
- » Cool Planning: A Handbook on Local Strategies to Slow Climate Change. Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program. 2012. Website: <http://www.oregon.gov/LCD/TGM/docs/coolplanninghandbook1312011.pdf>
- » Climate Smart Communities: Scenarios Project, Strategy Toolbox. Metro, August 2011. Website: [http://library.oregonmetro.gov/files/planning\\_and\\_development\\_-\\_regional\\_trans\\_reduction\\_strategies\\_and\\_the\\_benefits\\_they\\_bring\\_to\\_the\\_region\\_-\\_october\\_2011.pdf](http://library.oregonmetro.gov/files/planning_and_development_-_regional_trans_reduction_strategies_and_the_benefits_they_bring_to_the_region_-_october_2011.pdf)
- » Oregon Department of Administrative Services policy on facility siting: <http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/EAM/docs/1256115.pdf>

*The Toolkit is a component of the Oregon Sustainable Transportation Initiative (OSTI), which was formed to address the requirements of Senate Bill 1059 (2010).*

*For more information, please visit:*

*<http://cms.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/pages/ghgtoolkit.aspx>*

