



Comments on

Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy

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Vision for the Region

Smart Growth BC fully supports the proposed vision for the region. Metro Vancouver's proposed vision for the region incorporates the basic principles of smart growth leading to a sustainable future for the region. The vision's acknowledgement of the foundational role that the region's ecosystems play in maintaining and enhancing quality of life is particularly encouraging.

Smart Growth BC's Comments on Proposed Goals

Smart Growth BC supports the Regional Growth Strategy's proposed five goals. They and their strategies complete a comprehensive vision for regional growth management, and are integrated and reinforcing. The provisions in one strategy often increase the potential for successful implementation of other strategies. For example, protecting agricultural and green zone land will have a direct impact on creating compact communities.

We welcome the inclusion of Goal 3, which explicit acknowledges the economy's central role in creating a sustainable region. This addresses a weakness of the Livable Region Sustainability Plan, and increases the possibility that other sustainability goals will be considered in economic decision-making.

Smart Growth BC recommends an additional goal on strengthening planning and governance. Metro Vancouver's proposed Regional Growth Strategy goals builds onto those in the Livable Region Strategic Plan and previous regional plans. For over 40 years, regional and municipal governments have agreed that these goals in slightly varied forms should guide regional planning and development. The challenge is implementation: not what we want to do, but how to do it and who does what. Smart Growth BC recommends an additional goal to address this shortcoming and to emphasize the importance of new tools for effective implementation of regional planning goals.

New Recommended Goal:

Strengthen Regional Planning and Governance

Effective implementation of the five proposed regional goals is integrally linked to significant improvements to the regional governance and planning regime. Currently, Part 25 of the *Local Government Act* enables municipalities and regional districts to implement effective regional planning. But the emphasis is clearly on municipal agreement, consensus and voluntary coordination on region wide vision and goals. Experiences and results of the past decade have demonstrated that without better regional mechanisms for planning, compliance or enforcement it will be difficult to meet ambitious growth management targets necessary to meet the Province's 2020 climate goals and other growth management objectives such as those intended to focus new office development in town centres and controlling low density green field development.

Too often municipalities have put their individual short term interests ahead of regional long term benefits when making individual development and land-use decisions. To make regional growth management work, Metro Vancouver needs the ability to set region-wide growth management targets and review local land use decisions which do not conform to the regional growth strategy and to send the decision back to the municipality with recommendations on how to address the project's deficiencies.

Similarly, all municipalities need to recognize how they benefit from strong regional growth management. This will require truly courageous political leadership from municipal mayors and councilors to communicate to their constituencies how municipal interests are inextricably linked to regional sustainability.

New Recommended Strategy A:

Metro Vancouver sets regional standards to guide and coordinate municipal land use decisions.

Targets. Implementation of the current Livable Region Strategic Plan could have been significantly strengthened with the inclusion of more precise targets and benchmarks concerning density and sprawl. Additionally these targets need to be linked to rewards for making progress towards meeting targets and potential penalties for failures to do so. The Regional Growth Strategy should include:

- Urban growth boundaries that contain a 25 year supply of land for development at minimum prescribed densities, at least 40 units per hectare for residential;
- Before new green field development may be considered in the region, a municipality must have attained minimum densities of 30 units per hectare in existing built areas;
- All new development must be located within 500m of transit or 1 km of a commercial centre;
- All local governments must meet Provincial Government greenhouse gas reduction targets; and
- The annual municipal reporting required under Section 98 of the Community Charter would also include the targets set out in the Regional Growth Strategy. The regional district would continue to monitor regional progress.

New Recommended Strategy B:

Metro Vancouver uses current and additional oversight functions and incentive tools to ensure that municipalities are meeting regional growth strategy objectives

Metro Vancouver uses existing powers to ensure conformity of regional context statements and OCPs with regional growth strategy. More precise regional growth strategy targets will require more precise regional context statements and demonstration on how municipalities will meet the regional targets. Metro Vancouver should also work with the Province for increased powers to stop land-use decisions that contravene the regional growth strategy goals and targets. Although municipalities will retain primary control of land-use planning and decision-making the regional district will have the authority to assess the developments outside of urban growth boundaries and/or decisions which are in conflict with regional level land-use designations.

Incentives. Metro Vancouver will also needs increased ability to provide additional tax and other financial incentives to municipalities to encourage them to achieve their targets.

Metro Vancouver should work with the provincial government for authority to develop a wide range of regional-level incentives that are adaptable to urban, suburban and rural contexts and recognize differences in available local resources due to imbalances in property tax bases. Incentives must include regional-level mechanisms, such as tax shifting measures based on reducing negative environmental impact, transit subsidies and distance based insurance, and local-level mechanisms, such as enabling gradient development cost charges. (See Smart Growth BC's report, Innovative Infrastructure Financing Mechanisms for Smart Growth, available at www.smartgrowth.bc.ca)

Goal 1: Accommodate growth in a sustainable and compact metropolitan structure.

Strategy 1: Focus regional growth in centres and along transit corridors

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Designate major centres, transit station areas and corridors on a regional map; provide housing and job targets, transit service expectations, minimum density guidelines, and maximum parking guidelines.

Additional SGBC Recommendation

Provide financial incentives and regional and municipal transportation investments to encourage municipalities to invest in town centres and transit corridors.

Strategy 2: Establish defined areas for urban growth

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Designate Urban, Rural, and Green Zone land uses on a regional map to distinguish between land to be developed at urban densities, land to be developed at rural densities and lands to be protected from development.

Discussion:

A regional level rural land designation often already designated in municipal OCPs, should serve as a transition zone between urban and areas in the Agricultural Land Reserve. They would be rural in character allowing for smaller scale agricultural activities (e.g. hobby farms) and have minimum lot sizes of 6 hectares with no or minimal municipal infrastructure. In some cases the rural designations could not be contiguous with regional level urban designations, but only in cases where communities have a historical rural designation and/or have undevelopable topography, such as steep slopes, flood plains, aquifers.

Additional SGBC Recommendations

- Require municipalities to define Urban Growth Boundaries, which includes urban and rural zones.
- Agricultural lands should remain in the Green Zone.
- Any removals from the Green Zone or expansions of UCBs would still require a **unanimous Metro Vancouver vote**.
- Urban densities have a **minimum target density of 40 units per hectare**
- Rural densities have **minimum lot size of six hectares**.
- Refocus tax and financial incentives towards development in urban areas, and tax and financial incentives for agriculture-related activities in agricultural areas

There is a danger that regional rural land use designation could be used to justify low density suburban sprawl. As a result we suggest that a rural designation is acceptable in cases where:

- The rural designation acts as a benefit to non-residential zoning, rather than as an excuse for communities to designate more sprawl;
- The land helps to define the rural landscape character, and is clearly not suburban;
- There is a minimum lot size of six hectares;
- It acts as a buffer between agricultural and urban lands;
- It doesn't require sewer or water hookups;
- It is suitable for niche agricultural-like uses such as hobby farms.

Municipalities should only designate urban reserve in order identify where future urban growth within their UCB or where development will occur outside the UCB only once they have used the 25 year supply of land at 40 residential units per hectare. It should not be used for areas which aren't contiguous with existing urban areas.

Goal 2: Offer diverse and affordable housing choices.

Strategy 3: Increase housing supply and diversity, including the supply of housing for low and moderate income households

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C.

Establish region-wide provisions to stimulate the production of affordable housing, under this option, region-wide requirements would be included in the regional growth strategy which would provide a uniform approach to such matters as reduced parking regulations, development cost charges, and inclusionary zoning.

Discussion:

A regional approach to affordable housing is needed, so that municipal efforts are shared fairly. The targets in Option B are good; Option C insures their implementation.

Additional SGBC Recommendations:

- Require inclusionary zoning to meet affordable housing targets.
- Require region-wide development cost charges based on density gradients and distance to amenities.
- Facilitate the legalization of secondary suites throughout the region.
- Require infill before expansion to green fields.

Goal 3: Support and strengthen a diverse regional economy

Strategy 4: Maintain an adequate supply of industrial lands to meet the needs of the regional economy

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Designate industrial land as a regional land use category with specific guidelines on permitted uses. Industrial uses include manufacturing, processing, repair, warehouse, distribution, transportation, utilities, biomedical facilities as well as office and retail uses that support industrial activities. Stand alone office and retailing uses would not be considered industrial activities.

Discussion:

The City of Surrey has almost half of Greater Vancouver's currently vacant industrial land. It has almost 90 percent of the region's vacant land available for long term industrial development [*GVRD Industrial Lands Inventory*]. Virtually all the long-term land is susceptible to shorter-term residential or office park development. This illustrates the need for regional planning of industrial land to ensure that industrial land costs and benefits are shared throughout the region and a coordinated goods movement and an industrial land strategy.

Additional SGBC Recommendations:

- Build in flexibility for changing types of industrial zoning to reflect market conditions.
- Designate existing industrial lands adjacent to goods movement corridors (i.e. rail, water, and road) as regionally significant and encourage municipalities to zone these lands for those industrial uses heavily dependent on large volumes of goods movement instead of those industrial uses which primarily generate personal vehicle traffic. These other industrial users should be encouraged to locate in or near town centres or other areas with adequate transit service..
- Recognize that Surrey has the most available industrial sites. Negotiate with the municipality, and provide some carrots for cooperation.
- Intensify existing industrial lands before developing on new ones.

Strategy 5: Facilitate the location of major commercial (retail, office and entertainment) activities in centre locations to enhance access for workers and customers and build prosperous, attractive centres in every subregion.

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Establish policies to encourage commercial development in major centres and policies to discourage the establishment of major commercial development outside of centres.

Discussion:

Several factors are drawing employment centres, particularly office parks, outside of town centres. These factors include compared to 30-40% lower construction costs, easier land assembly, and better ability to stage construction as business expands.

Unfortunately, office parks shift transportation costs to taxpayers and to their employees, by providing large amounts of 'free' parking in locations where the only practical access is by car. Office park tenants are far more sensitive to construction costs than to access to transit. [*The GVRD Office Market: Supply, Demand and Spacial Distribution*]. Regional policies can encourage municipalities to reduce the cost disparities between office parks and town centres.

Additional SGBC Recommendations:

- Institute a region-wide density gradient DCCs structure which maximize taxpayers' investments in existing infrastructure;
- Encourage municipalities to locate large office tenants with many employees in town centres, using tax increment financing, land assembly (such as redevelopment agencies do in the U.S.), and zoning to ease competition for the land by other commercial or residential uses;
- Locate major public facilities and services in town centres;
- Enrich town centres with public investment in art, transportation, street lighting, etc.;
- Provide incentives to encourage transit-oriented development around all skytrain stations.

Strategy 6: Maintain the agricultural land base for food production through supportive land use and development policies.

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Provide an agricultural land designation in the regional growth strategy and require municipalities to define policies to address the agricultural/urban interface.

Discussion:

While the Right To Farm Act has generally protected farming on ALR land, increasing conflict between residential subdivisions and farming has caused municipalities to restrict certain farm activities due to noise and smell complaints. The Ministry of Agriculture is developing edge planning guidelines for both the urban and farm sides to address these conflicts it would be beneficial for Metro Vancouver to work with the Ministry and adopt common set of guidelines to ensure a cohesive edge planning policy.

Additional Smart Growth BC Recommendations:

- This strategy should acknowledge the Agricultural Land Commission, and their role in governing the Agricultural Land Reserve;
- Require municipalities to adhere to a regional level agricultural/urban interface policy. Metro Vancouver would work with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop this region-wide policy.

Goal 4: Protect and enhance the region's natural assets

Strategy 7: Ensure the long-term protection of critical habitat areas, drinking watersheds, riparian areas, parks, recreation corridors, forests and agricultural lands.

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option B

Designate a Green Zone in the RGS and provide a schedule of permitted uses for lands in the Green Zone.

Discussion:

A schedule of permitted uses is needed, since at times inappropriate uses have occurred in the Green Zone. Zoning that predates Green Zone designation currently permits industrial uses such as auto repair and junkyards. In the worst examples, non-conforming residential townhouse development has been permitted.

Additional Smart Growth BC Recommendations:

- Permitted uses in the Green zone should include parks and recreation, watershed protection, habitat and ecological services protection, sustainable small scale forestry, agricultural production, and active transportation only corridors.

Strategy 8: Ensure the protection and enhancement of ecological and recreational connectivity across the region

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option B

Provide guidelines for integrating ecological values into land use development processes and identify on a reference map the ecological and recreational greenways.

Discussion:

Connectivity is critical for species survival, but it cuts across land ownership and jurisdictional patterns. This starts a long term strategy to protect current corridors, and gradually expand the regional network with each municipality doing what it can within its own constraints.

Goal 5: Create a sustainable regional transportation system

Strategy 9: Increase transit supply throughout the region and promote walking and cycling.

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Identify a frequent transit network on a regional map, and set targets for transit ridership increases in each subregion, density guidelines, and establish targets for cycling and walking.

Discussion:

This will encourage the cooperation between TransLink, as implementer of the frequent transit network, and Metro Vancouver as the responsible agency for land use and transportation strategy. Subregional targets can encourage municipalities to provide the density needed to make transit service economically viable.

Strategy 10: Advance a regional network of roads and highways that prioritizes goods movement, transit operations and high-occupancy vehicles.

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option C

Identify a regional roads and highways network on a regional map and identify specific road management principles.

Discussion:

The road management principles should emphasize goods movement and transit priority.

Additional Smart Growth BC Recommendations:

Metro Vancouver should also work with Translink to identify other transportation corridors for goods movement, in particular the waterways and rail systems.

Strategy 11: Manage transportation demand

Smart Growth BC's Recommendation: Option B.

Identify demand management strategies in the regional growth strategy

Discussion:

This would help create a seamless emphasis on goods movement and transit priority for municipalities, and encourage regional cooperation between Metro Vancouver and TransLink on regional issues such as road pricing.