

Urban Centres and Frequent Transit Development Areas Local Implementation Case Studies

Urban Centres and FTDA Implementation Best Practice Case Study

Topic: From Suburban to Urban: The Role of Public Sector Investment in Creating Surrey's City Centre

Centre/FTDA: Surrey Metro Core

Municipality: City of Surrey

Surrey's City Centre goes beyond the role of other Metro Vancouver Urban Centres as focal points for concentrated growth and transit services to also fill the role of a second metropolitan core for the Lower Mainland. Public sector investment has been key in transforming Surrey's City Centre into the region's second "downtown" by locating regional-scale employment and services, major institutions and other trip-generators, and large public gathering spaces, all in walking distance from a major regional transportation hub.



Surrey's [City Centre Plan](#), endorsed by Council in 2017, is guiding the process of transforming what was once a suburban town centre into a walkable, transit-oriented downtown core for business, cultural, and entertainment activity. This transformation began long before 2017 however with important public investments, targeted to spur redevelopment, economic clustering, and transportation mode shift.

Beginning in the 1990s, major transit infrastructure investment - the SkyTrain extension into Surrey- laid the foundation for the development of a more "urban" framework in City Centre. The opening of SkyTrain in 1994 was followed by the construction of Simon Fraser University's Surrey Campus, a Triple-A office tower and the redevelopment of a 29-acre urban park, Holland Park in 2003. These developments started to change the energy in the downtown to include a greater presence of employees and students in the core area.

The development momentum in the City Centre did not fully emerge however, until over a decade later with the construction of key public sector developments including the Central Library that opened in 2011, the RCMP E Division in 2013, expansion of the Surrey Memorial Hospital and Outpatient Care Facility in 2011 & 2013, and the City Hall and Civic Plaza in 2014.

These public sector investments have created a centre of gravity in the downtown core that is attracting residential and office development. Over 4,100 new residential units have been built in the past 10 years and the area has approximately 10 million square feet of office and commercial space. There are currently over 40 major projects in-stream in City Centre.

This increasing density is creating an impetus to re-shape the area with a finer-grained road network and greenways to enable safer walking and cycling. Looking ahead to the next decade, this transit-oriented development will be further strengthened with the future construction of the Surrey-Newton-Guildford line.

Lessons Learned

- **Investments in specialized park space yield civic and environmental benefits:** Holland Park, one of the first major public investments in the City Centre, provides a good example of a successful public space. At 10 hectares, the park was designed with major public festivals and concerts in mind as the park's lawn



was specially engineered to support drainage and to withstand large numbers of people and equipment. The park offers a variety of amenities to attract different types of users throughout the day including large playing fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, an amphitheatre, and free WiFi internet access. The park was one of the first major public investments in Surrey City Centre and ongoing programming such as Fusion Festival, Movies Under the Stars, and Live Nation Concerts has helped to animate the park and create a sense of place. Holland Park is also an important urban green space in this growing urban centre. As more and more residents and workers move to this area

– the park will serve an increasingly important role of providing access to nature for urban dwellers.

- **Support public space usability by experimenting with movable furniture and removing barriers**

to access: Surrey planners continue to learn from the new Surrey Civic Plaza located north of Surrey Central Station and framed to the north and west by the new City Hall and Surrey Library. Designed as an important gathering and public space, the Civic Plaza has not yet seen the usage expected. Staff have experimented with movable street furniture to see if it helps attract more users. Plans to relocate the bus loop one block west may also help by creating a more walkable and direct connection between Surrey Civic Plaza and Central City Plaza to the south (outside SFU Surrey).



- **Siting major trip-generators in urban centres supports local and regional objectives:** Siting SFU Surrey at Surrey Central Station is a successful example of locating major trip-generators in urban centres. With over 7,500 students taking classes throughout the day, SFU Surrey is an important anchor destination on the Expo Line and several other bus routes, helping to drive ridership in all directions all day, every day. It has also helped to activate Surrey City Central and spurred on other forms of economic development in the area. Collaborative planning with SFU Surrey will continue to ensure the success of Surrey City Centre. SFU Surrey has plans to expand its classroom space as well as plans to locate student housing in the area.

- **Increasing intersection density and reducing block size supports mode shift:** The presence of large “superblocks” has made walking, cycling, and transit less attractive than expected in the City Centre despite the completion of the Expo Line in 1994. The 2017 City Centre Plan has since envisioned a restructured road network to create a finer grained grid network with separated lanes for cyclists and more sidewalks. This provides a more pedestrian-friendly environment which will support walking and cycling as well as encourage transit use. It will also improve safety by reducing traffic speeds and provide more opportunities for safe crossings.



- **Take advantage of opportunities to integrate district energy systems into urban centres:** Metro Vancouver urban centre policy encourages district energy and renewable energy generation in urban centres where appropriate. Urban Centres and FTDA provide the higher-density compact urban form that



make district energy systems effective. Higher density neighbourhoods also reduce the cost of the distribution systems. Surrey City Energy is the City-owned district energy system that supplies residential, commercial, and institutional buildings in City Centre with heat and hot water. New buildings in City Centre are required to connect to the district energy system. This will help improve energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide competitive and stable long-term energy pricing for resident and businesses.

Contact information

Carla Stewart, Senior Policy Planner, Community Planning Division, City of Surrey
CStewart@surrey.ca | 604-591-4594