

QUICKNOTES

Corridor Planning

Corridors are linear pathways that connect places and allow for the movement of people, goods, or wildlife. They often center around transportation infrastructure such as streets, highways, and public transit, but can also center around historic sites, habitats, rivers, or other natural features. They may be regional in scale, as in a heavy rail corridor, or extremely local, as in a retail corridor along a city thoroughfare.

Some corridor plan areas cross jurisdictional boundaries and require participation from multiple cities or counties (in addition to state or federal partners). Others deal only with a corridor as a subarea of a single jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

Some corridor planning efforts focus primarily on managing change in the built environment, while others focus primarily on protecting existing resources from encroaching development. Common types of corridor plans include plans for transportation corridors, commercial corridors, technology or manufacturing corridors, scenic corridors, habitat corridors, and historic or cultural heritage corridors.

Transportation corridor plans typically involve the development and evaluation of a number of alternatives to address an identified problem or need, followed by the selection of a preferred alternative and, finally, construction or implementation. Along commercial corridors, a mismatch between existing land-use and development patterns and current or projected market demand often motivates corridor planning. Technology corridors and manufacturing corridors cater to one dominant land use that generates a significant amount of employment or tax revenue for a local jurisdiction.

Conservation-based corridors may be planned with people or wildlife in mind. For example, plans for scenic view corridors aim to protect views of natural features and rural development along a roadway. A desire to protect riparian or upland habitat for one or more species often motivates plans for environmentally sensitive corridors. Historic and cultural heritage corridors may center around formerly vital transportation corridors or form an informal trail of related historic sites.

For any type of corridor, local and regional corridor planning efforts must be consistent with applicable state and federal laws. For example, many states have laws that support the long-term preservation of corridors for future transportation infrastructure development. But, even in those states where there is no specific legislation related to corridor planning, local jurisdictions must still take care to ensure that corridor planning activities comply with laws related to environmental protection, zoning, eminent domain, exactions, and other land-use considerations.

DEFINING THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The process of developing a corridor plan begins with defining the geographic extent of the plan area as well as the problems or issues to be considered as part of the plan analysis and recommendations.

In some corridor planning efforts, the corridor is a man-made linear feature, such as a roadway or rail corridor. In others, it is a natural feature, such as river or upland vegetation corridor that differs from its surroundings. In either case, the corridor plan area typically includes land (or surface water features) adjacent to the corridor. The total width, or depth, of the plan area at any point may be based on a fixed distance from the center or edge of the corridor, or it may be tied to changes in land ownership, cover, use, or topography.

Cadionads, Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)



Big Beaver Road is a prominent commercial corridor running through Detroit's northern suburbs.



American Planning Association

Making Great Communities Happen

The type of corridor is not inherently tied to the purpose of the corridor planning effort. That is, not all planning efforts for man-made corridors focus primarily on managing change in the built environment, and not all planning efforts for natural corridors focus primarily on protecting existing resources.

ESTABLISHING A VISION FOR THE CORRIDOR

Successful corridor planning efforts require extensive communication with stakeholders and the public throughout all phases of plan development and implementation. Involving a wide variety of participants in the planning process can help ensure that the resulting plan engages and supports the people who live, work, and travel along a corridor. Corridor plans should look outside their boundaries to ensure that they are well supported by and connected to adjacent neighborhoods, communities, or landscapes. This may mean creating a safe and welcoming environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users in addition to vehicular traffic.

The structure of a corridor plan typically includes an analysis of existing conditions, including current data and future projections of demographics, economic trends, and traffic generation. This assessment may also address strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the study area. Plans may arrange their goals and objectives by topic (e.g., land use, mobility), geographic segments (e.g., blocks along a street), or a combination of the two. A corridor plan should include a set of recommendations to guide land-use decision making and public investments.

Visual elements of a corridor plan may include images of existing conditions and graphs or charts to depict data trends. Maps are a valuable tool to depict the locations of existing facilities and issues, and they can also be used to show recommended locations for future land uses and public investments. Graphic renderings can be helpful to depict the desired end result of plan recommendations pertaining to land use, signage, landscaping, and aesthetics.

IMPLEMENTING THE CORRIDOR VISION

Once the corridor plan has been developed, the implementation of a plan's recommendations will typically require a combination of regulations, investments, and partnerships. Implementation strategies can include a variety of programs and partnerships with stakeholders, such as intergovernmental agreements to pursue regionwide priorities, or conservation easements in an environmental corridor.

Changes to local land-use and development regulations may first require modifying the recommendations of the comprehensive plan for the corridor area. Properties within the study area may be rezoned to different classifications, or a new corridor overlay might be created to supplement the underlying zoning regulations. A corridor overlay district could include access management standards, landscaping requirements, and design standards specific to the goals and objectives of the corridor plan.

The corridor vision may also require public infrastructure investments to realign, reallocate, or expand the facilities within the public right-of-way. This could include widening a roadway or reducing vehicle lane widths within the existing pavement footprint to accommodate additional transit, bicycles, or pedestrians.

CONCLUSION

Corridors are a fundamental element of urban and rural landscapes, serving to connect people with places while also offering the potential for their own unique identities. Whether the intention is to encourage new investment or protect areas from development, corridor planning requires careful consideration of the users of a corridor as well as the purpose that the corridor serves in the larger local or regional plan. Close work with a diverse set of stakeholders, neighboring jurisdictions, and regional entities allows corridor plans to complement and advance a broad set of community goals.

PAS QuickNotes (ISSN 2169-1940) is a publication of the American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service (PAS). Visit PAS online at planning.org/pas to find out how PAS can work for you. James M. Drinan, JD, Chief Executive Officer; David Rouse, FAICP, Managing Director of Research and Advisory Services; David Morley, AICP, Editor. © 2018 American Planning Association, which has offices at 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601-5927, and 1030 15th St., NW, Suite 750 West, Washington, DC 20005-1503; planning.org. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means without permission in writing from APA.

FURTHER READING

1. Published by the American Planning Association

Dixon, David. 2011. "Rethinking Corridors." *Zoning Practice*, February. Available at planning.org/publications/document/9006931.

Olsen, Kurt, Alison Nelson, and Alexandra Roberts Bullock. 2009. "Community Visioning and Corridor Planning: Experiences from Lincoln City, Oregon." *PAS Memo*, November/December. Available at planning.org/pas/memo/2009/nov.

2. Other Resources

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. 2008. *Great Corridors, Great Communities*. New York: Project for Public Spaces. Available at <http://bit.ly/2xE2yeM>.

Twaddell, Hannah. 2006. "Corridors Through Our Communities." *Planning Commissioners Journal*, Spring. Available at <http://bit.ly/2lbH5ho>.