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Making Room for Housing near Transit: Zoning's Promise and Barriers

An Examination of Policy and Outcomes in the Puget Sound

Nestled between the Cascades and the Olympic Mountains, blessed with moderate weather, and home to a strong job market, the Puget Sound is one of the most attractive metropolitan areas in the United States. These conditions have encouraged growth: among the country's 50 largest cities, Seattle grew faster than all but Fort Worth and Austin from 2010 to 2020. This momentum, however, has had negative consequences. Affordability has declined, and the region does not have adequate housing to meet demand, reducing its ability to attract residents or retain its existing population.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Recent approval of major taxpayer-supported transit investments will expand access to mobility for residents in communities throughout the Puget Sound region, as \$54 billion in planned expenditures will add dozens of new light rail and bus rapid transit stations between 2023 and 2044. These projects will speed commutes for residents and workers, offering them affordable, environmentally sustainable travel options.

These new transit investments could set the stage for more housing options in the region, but much of the land near stations is now zoned to limit housing construction or housing density. About one third of station-adjacent land is zoned for only single-family homes; almost 50 percent requires at least one parking spot per unit. Both zoning restrictions add to housing costs, making new construction more difficult and new homes more expensive. And zoning allowances for new housing are not proportionate to real estate demand, with many of the region's most popular jurisdictions subject to stringent land-use regulations.

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