Metro

HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT
Strategy Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRAFT - April 26, 2023

Introduction

Since greater Portland's Blue Line MAX light rail service began in 1986 and the 2040 Growth Strategy was adopted in 1995, high-capacity transit (HCT) has served as the backbone of the region's growth and prosperity. The 2009 HCT Plan laid the groundwork for the continued expansion of the system, including investments like the FX Division Transit project.

Despite periodic downturns in the economy, competition for resources among many regional needs, and most recently a global pandemic, HCT continues to play a vital role in meeting the region's goals.

The High Capacity Transit Strategy Update refreshes the vision described in the 2009 Plan, and provides a shared vision and action plan for developing new HCT corridors. It includes an adaptable approach to HCT investments that is nimble, flexible, and cost-effective, with a greater emphasis on potential rapid bus corridors.

This strategy update is part of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which is being updated in 2023.

What does this strategy update do?

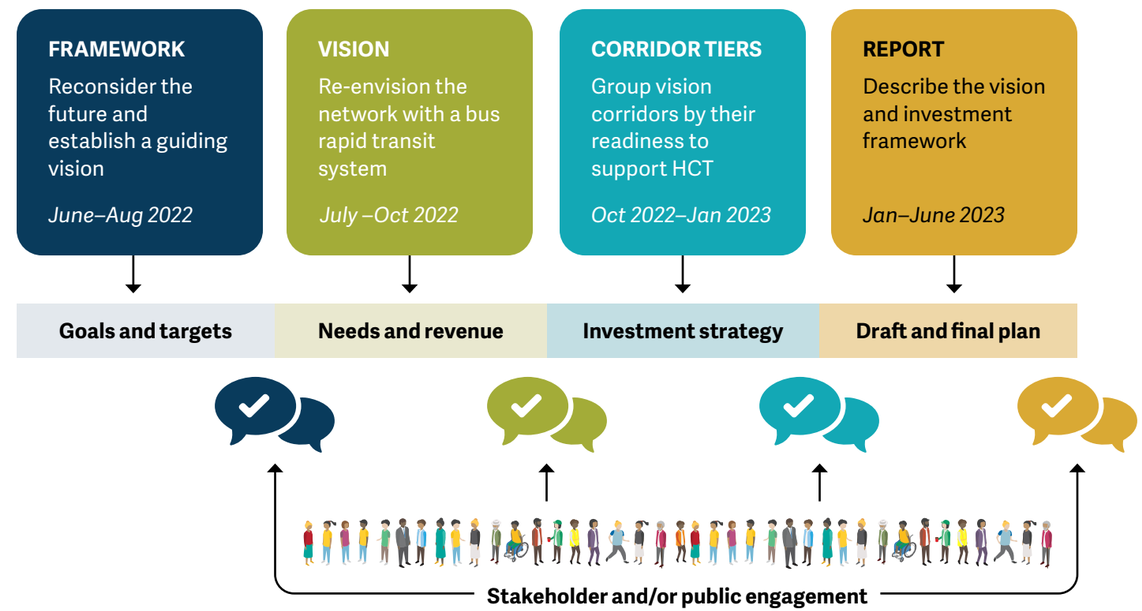
- Summarizes the regional vision for HCT investment, strategies for moving HCT corridors forward towards implementation, and policies for supporting HCT
- Includes a tiered plan for developing future HCT corridors
- Accounts for regional growth, how community needs have changed, and how travel is different
- Highlights the important role of local agencies and partners in moving HCT corridors forward
- Guides near- and long-term decision-making
- Sets the region up for funding these projects
- Addresses system operations improvements and "state of good repair" investments

Why update the HCT strategy?

Since greater Portland's HCT strategy was first developed in 2009, much has changed:

- The region's awareness and level of urgency has increased on issues like inequalities based on people's race and income, housing affordability and displacement, the impacts of climate change, and safety.
- The pandemic brought major changes to how and where people travel. Concerns about personal safety and health continue to impact how people use transit and how providers operate today.
- Population and job growth has continued, with tens of thousands more people making the region their home since 2009.
- Finding money for HCT investments has become a greater challenge. There are limited local dollars available for matching federal grants, directly funding HCT corridor design and construction, or operating HCT corridors.

What were the phases of the HCT strategy update?



How does the HCT strategy update support our regional goals?

Equity

- Improve access to high-quality transit and faster travel for people with low incomes and other underserved communities
- Improve local air quality
- Minimize displacement of people or businesses and maintain housing affordability

Climate

- Shift more driving trips to transit to reduce GHG emissions
- Help address congestion by investing tolling revenues into HCT in congested corridors
- Use electric transit vehicles or other clean fuels to reduce emissions

Mobility

- Provide an affordable alternative to driving
- Connect regional and town centers as part of the 2040 Growth Concept
- Ensure a safe, welcoming system that is attractive to riders
- Make sure people can safely and comfortably get to HCT stations
- Invest in the existing HCT system to fix chokepoints, like the Steel Bridge

Economy

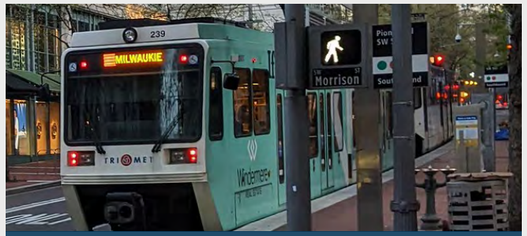
- Support healthy communities and bolster local economies
- Make sure HCT connects people, jobs, and essential services
- Minimize time spent waiting while transferring to make multiple trips easier
- Develop housing near HCT that welcomes people of all incomes and backgrounds and avoids displacement
- Help the region grow in a way that preserves farm and forestlands

Safety

- Make transit rider safety the highest priority
- Consider the pros and cons of different safety programs, such as education and communication versus enforcement
- Design streets to be safe for all people

What is high-capacity transit?

High capacity transit is a type of public transportation that moves a lot of people quickly and often.



Light Rail Transit (LRT)

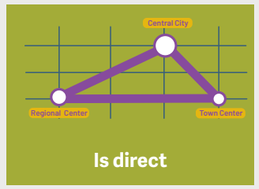
Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Rapid Bus

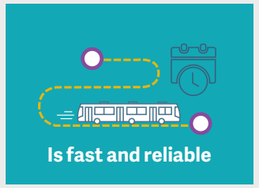
Commuter Rail

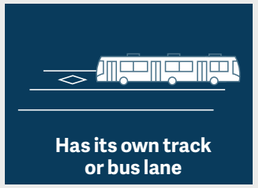
Streetcar

Commuter rail and streetcar expand the reach of the high capacity transit network. Further investment in the elements that make transit high quality would increase their capacity to move more people (e.g., frequency, speed, and/or span).

High-capacity transit ...





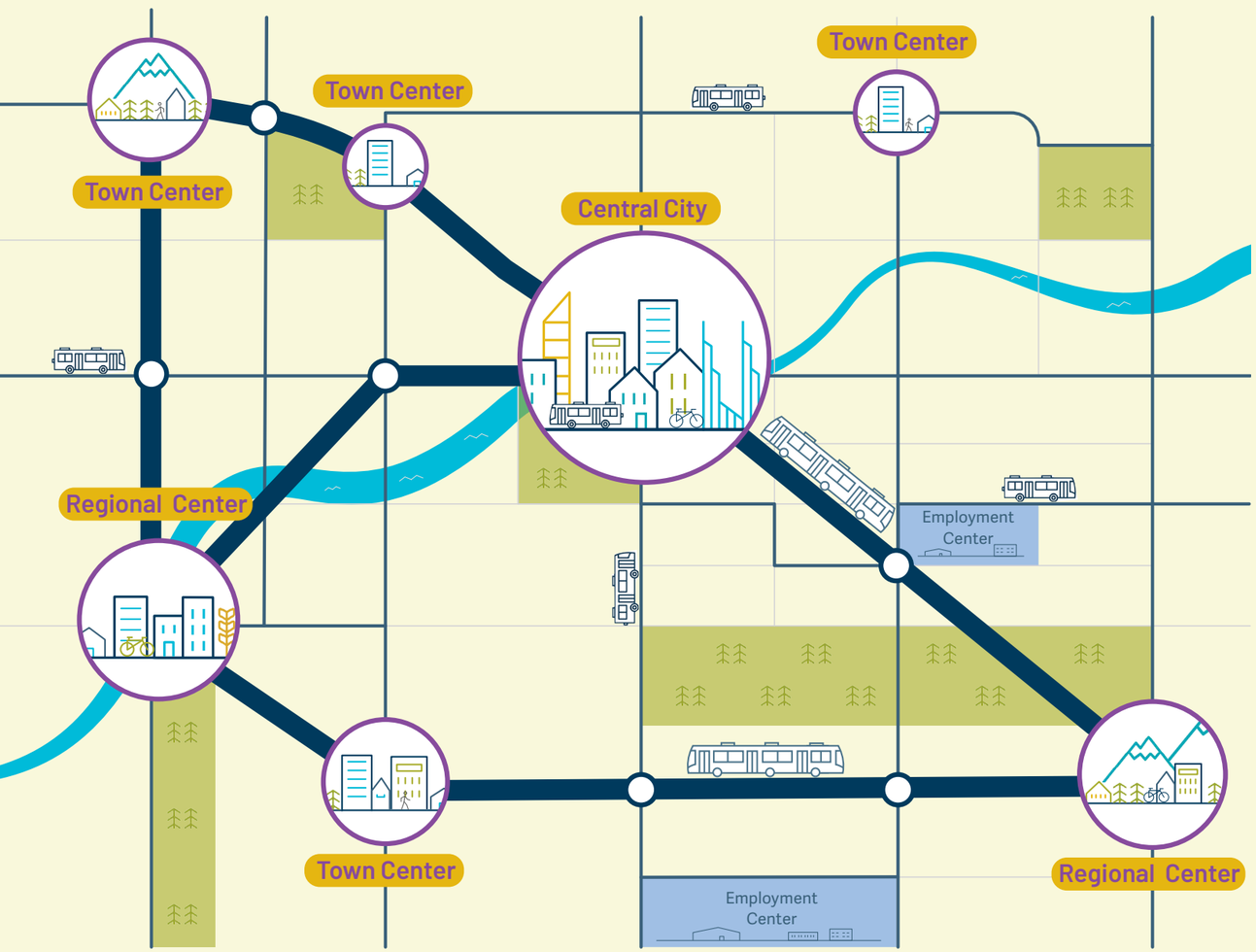


High-Capacity Transit Vision

The HCT Vision is the future network of HCT corridors with enhanced features such as shelters and real-time travel information, as well as dedicated travel space for transit that moves more people quickly and comfortably.

The vision reimagines a strong HCT network that supports compact land development, broadens connections, and increases options for getting around the region.

Well-connected and people-focused, the vision creates connections between activity centers; along corridors; to jobs, services, and other major destinations (e.g., colleges, hospitals, affordable housing); and prioritizes mobility improvement for communities of color and other marginalized communities.



How did we develop the Vision?

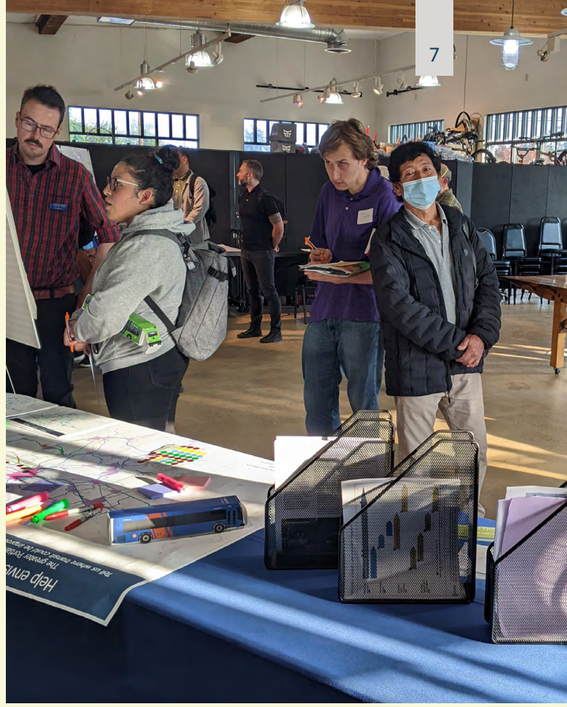
The project team worked with partners and the public to answer these questions:

- Where are more people traveling today and where will they want to travel in the future?
- What connections link the most people and underserved communities to jobs, important services and other places?
- How long does a transit trip in a certain area currently take compared to driving?
- How much could an investment in high capacity transit improve travel?
- What are the needs and priorities of community members and organizations, businesses, agency partners and elected officials

What did we hear from the community?

Metro and TriMet talked with people at many community events, meetings and took feedback through the project website. We heard the following priorities from the community:

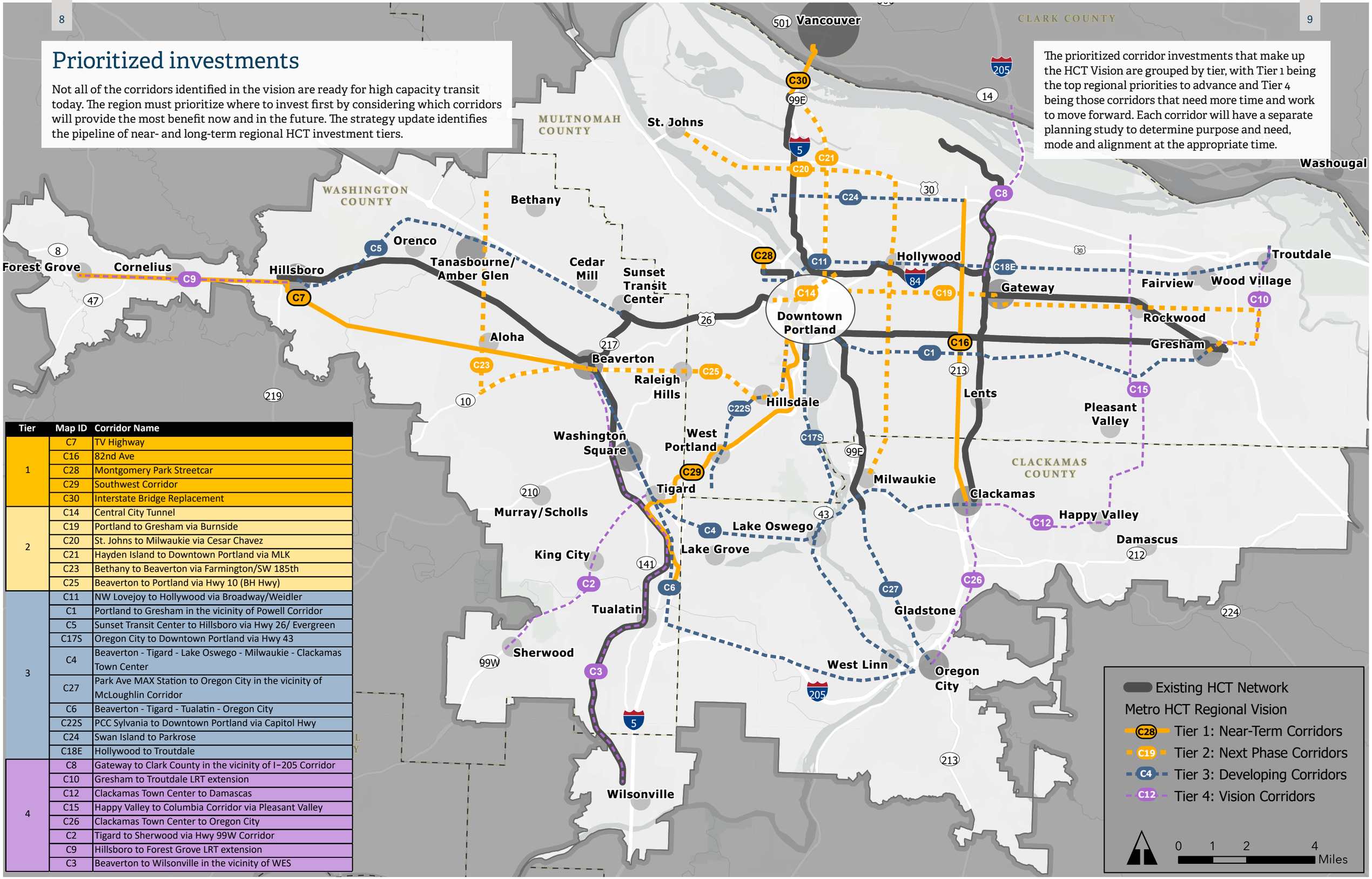
- **Community stability:** strong support for investments in corridors to maintain housing and business affordability and avoid displacement.
- **Safe access to transit:** Support for facilities that enable safe and comfortable walking and biking to transit and waiting at the transit stop (crosswalks, sidewalks, lighting, bus stop amenities).
- **Transit service:** support for more frequent, faster, and reliable service. Support for expanding service, particularly to growing areas and town centers in the broader region.
- **Broaden access:** better serve community members who are older, who do not speak English, who have mobility or other disabilities, who have health conditions, who are travelling with children, or who are in school.



Prioritized investments

Not all of the corridors identified in the vision are ready for high capacity transit today. The region must prioritize where to invest first by considering which corridors will provide the most benefit now and in the future. The strategy update identifies the pipeline of near- and long-term regional HCT investment tiers.

The prioritized corridor investments that make up the HCT Vision are grouped by tier, with Tier 1 being the top regional priorities to advance and Tier 4 being those corridors that need more time and work to move forward. Each corridor will have a separate planning study to determine purpose and need, mode and alignment at the appropriate time.

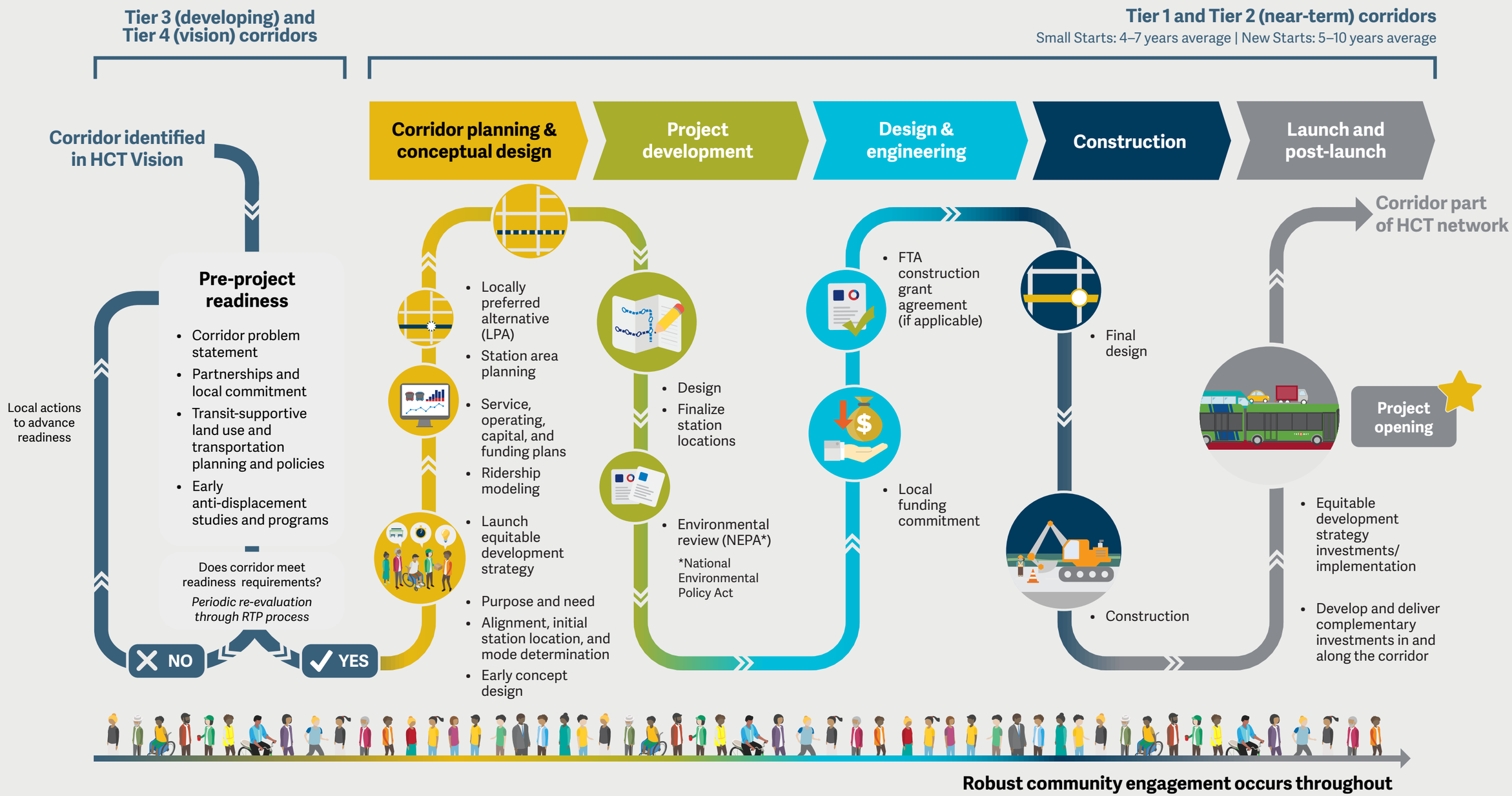


Tier	Map ID	Corridor Name
1	C7	TV Highway
	C16	82nd Ave
	C28	Montgomery Park Streetcar
	C29	Southwest Corridor
	C30	Interstate Bridge Replacement
2	C14	Central City Tunnel
	C19	Portland to Gresham via Burnside
	C20	St. Johns to Milwaukie via Cesar Chavez
	C21	Hayden Island to Downtown Portland via MLK
	C23	Bethany to Beaverton via Farmington/SW 185th
	C25	Beaverton to Portland via Hwy 10 (BH Hwy)
3	C11	NW Lovejoy to Hollywood via Broadway/Weidler
	C1	Portland to Gresham in the vicinity of Powell Corridor
	C5	Sunset Transit Center to Hillsboro via Hwy 26/ Evergreen
	C17S	Oregon City to Downtown Portland via Hwy 43
	C4	Beaverton - Tigard - Lake Oswego - Milwaukie - Clackamas Town Center
	C27	Park Ave MAX Station to Oregon City in the vicinity of McLoughlin Corridor
	C6	Beaverton - Tigard - Tualatin - Oregon City
	C22S	PCC Sylvania to Downtown Portland via Capitol Hwy
	C24	Swan Island to Parkrose
	C18E	Hollywood to Troutdale
4	C8	Gateway to Clark County in the vicinity of I-205 Corridor
	C10	Gresham to Troutdale LRT extension
	C12	Clackamas Town Center to Damascas
	C15	Happy Valley to Columbia Corridor via Pleasant Valley
	C26	Clackamas Town Center to Oregon City
	C2	Tigard to Sherwood via Hwy 99W Corridor
	C9	Hillsboro to Forest Grove LRT extension
	C3	Beaverton to Wilsonville in the vicinity of WES

How will corridors move forward?

The figure below shows how corridors move through different stages of planning, engineering, and construction.

Tier 1 and 2 corridors are ready to move forward in the near term, while tier 3 and 4 corridors need more work to make them ready for investment.



Supporting HCT development

Near-term HCT investments take existing strong transit connections to the next level, while highlighting current and future corridor needs like safety, access and livability. For transit investments to be successful, other transit supportive improvements are key to creating an environment that encourages current and future transit ridership while meeting regional objectives around equity and affordability.

The strategy update presents the transit-supportive elements that make a corridor ready for high capacity transit investment. The figure below shows some of the strategies and recommendations for setting a corridor up for success as it moves forward in the project development process. More information on each element is available on p. 14.

	Land use, urban context, and transit-oriented development	Community stability and resilience	Transit access: complete streets, safety, and mobility options	Transportation demand management programs and policies	Transit affordability and fare programs	Transportation system management and operations
Why does it matter?	Density and mixed uses support high-frequency service and modeshare goals	Strategies to ensure existing residents and and small businesses benefit from HCT investments	Multimodal streets help people get to and from transit safely	Incentivize alternatives to driving, and increase attractiveness and awareness of transit options	Make transit more affordable and accessible to all people	Make transit a competitive alternative to driving
What does it include?	• Supportive land uses including mixed use developments • Transformation potential through transit-oriented development and higher-density development aligned with 2040 Growth Concept and the community's vision for growth • Supportive planning and policies • Local commitment to corridor investment	• Robust community input and engagement • Equitable development and affordable housing strategies • Local anti-displacement policies and actions • Targeted support for small businesses	• Pedestrian network completion (sidewalks, crossings, accessibility, lighting, etc.) • Bicycle network connections • Transit-supportive street design • Transit stop and station amenities • Mobility hubs • Shared mobility options • First/last mile connections • Shuttles • Bicycle parking and storage	• Parking policies • Education and outreach • Employer benefits programs • Transportation wallet programs • University/school affiliate programs (i.e., student passes, education programs)	• HOP Pass • Reduced Fare Programs: Youth, Low-income, Honored Citizen, and Veterans • Free fare grant programs • Employer-sponsored transit discount programs	• Optimize existing transit system operations and performance • Transit-priority treatments • Passenger information technology
When is it done?	All stages	Pre-project and ongoing	All stages	Pre-project and ongoing	Pre-project and ongoing	Pre-project, as part of implementation, and ongoing
Who is responsible?	• Local jurisdictions • Metro • Transit service providers • DLCD	• Local jurisdictions • Local Housing Authorities • Metro • *CBOs* • *Chambers of Commerce / business organizations*	• Local jurisdictions • Metro • Transit service providers • *Shared mobility providers* • ODOT	• Local jurisdictions • Metro • Transit service providers • ODOT • *Employers and schools/ universities* • *CBOs*	• Transit service providers • Metro • *Employers and schools/ universities* • *CBOs*	• Local jurisdictions • Transit service providers • Metro • ODOT

Notes: Partners shown in *italics*. CBO: Community-based organization. DLCD: Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. ODOT: Oregon Department of Transportation.

Where will the money come from?

The Federal Transit Administration administers several grant programs that could support HCT investments. These federal programs have long been an important source of funding for the region's existing HCT system and will continue to be an essential component of HCT investment in the Portland region.

Local funding is crucial to meeting the match requirements of federal grants – "match" refers to the amount of local (or sometimes other state/federal money) required to secure a grant. To be competitive, the region generally needs to provide a 50% local match.

Not every project will need federal funding, though. Some corridors may be able to advance with local funds, especially those rapid bus corridors that have lower capital investment needs.

Operations

Funding to design and construct HCT corridors is only part of the funding story. Long-term funding is also needed to operate HCT corridors – ongoing dollars to pay drivers and keep systems maintained and supported. There are several dedicated sources of funding for transit capital projects, but fewer grant sources for ongoing operations. All HCT corridor projects will need to develop a plan to fund operations and maintenance of these investments.

Looking forward

The region's multi-decade investment in MAX light rail will continue to be the backbone of the regional transit system, connecting the Central City and regional centers. As we look to advance new HCT corridors to serve more people and jobs aligned with land use goals, new approaches like rapid bus corridors present promising opportunities for system expansion. Rapid bus can provide many of the benefits of light rail at a cost that is more in line with current regional funding constraints, reduces the risk of potential displacement, and helps connect town and regional centers in constrained corridors. Other HCT approaches—streetcar in dense urban areas and light rail extensions to serve more regional centers—will also help us implement the vision.

The strategy update calls for HCT projects that fit within the context of communities, serve as the foundation of our regional transportation system, and provide an important tool for supporting community development and maximizing regional goals.

Metro