

3. ELEMENTS OF THE *METRO VISION 2035 PLAN*

What is Metro Vision...and why does it matter? For more than 50 years, DRCOG has championed a regional perspective on key issues facing the metropolitan area and identified solutions through cooperative local government action. Metro Vision, DRCOG’s long-range plan for future growth and development, is the current example of this regional approach. The goal of Metro Vision is very simple and important – to protect the quality of life that makes the Denver region such an attractive place to live, work, play, and raise a family. About 2.9 million people live in the DRCOG region. By 2035, the population is expected to increase by about 50 percent to 4.3 million.

The Board members of the Denver Regional Council of Governments adopted the first Metro Vision Plan (for 2020) in 1997. In 2005, the Board adopted the Metro Vision Plan that extended the planning period from 2020 to 2030. In 2007, the *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* was adopted. An update to the *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* is scheduled to be adopted in January, 2011. Metro Vision outlines long-term goals for the region in three key areas: growth and development, transportation and environment quality.

With an active commitment from political, business and civic leaders and residents throughout our region to implement Metro Vision per its original “guiding vision” of 1992, we can ensure that the Denver region retains the very qualities we value – natural beauty, economic vitality, cultural heritage, optimism and a sense of opportunity.

Metro Vision Guiding Vision

Adopted 1992

The health of downtown Denver, urban cores and the surrounding communities is necessary for, and synergistically linked to, the success and vitality of the region. To promote the health of all communities in the region, an equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of regional development is needed. This sharing could provide every community the resources to respond to the impacts of growth consistent with a vision for itself, while giving each a stake in quality planning and development for the health of the region as a whole.

Effective and efficient cooperative use of limited resources, whether financial, societal or natural, is essential to achieve the goals of the plan and progress toward a sustainable future. Through the implementation of the regional plan, the region can be a place where its people live close to where they work and play, where a balanced transportation network connects mixed-use urban centers, where urban communities are defined by significant open space, and where cultural diversity and respect for the natural environment are celebrated.

The physical and cultural diversity of the many communities which comprise the Denver region creates the opportunity for a wide variety of economic development initiatives and living styles. Individual communities should prosper by contributing to regional efforts in regional facilities, transportation, air quality, water quality, water supply, waste management, provision of open space and land use mix. In turn, a stronger, more “livable” region will serve to strengthen and sustain its individual communities.

A. Metro Vision Key Principles

Key principles have guided Metro Vision's development:

Metro Vision protects and enhances the region's quality of life.

Metro Vision's most basic purpose is to safeguard for future generations the region's many desirable qualities, including beautiful landscapes, interesting and livable communities, cultural and entertainment facilities, and employment and educational opportunities.

Metro Vision is aspirational, long-range and regional in focus.

Metro Vision's planning period extends to 2035 to help the region address future concerns, while considering current priorities too. The plan expresses a high-level regional perspective on how the region as a whole can fulfill the vision of Metro Vision.

Metro Vision offers direction for local implementation.

Local governments can use Metro Vision as they make decisions about land use planning and development. Metro Vision also helps local governments coordinate their efforts with one another and with other organizations.

Metro Vision respects local plans.

The region's local governments developed Metro Vision, working collaboratively through DRCOG. The plan doesn't replace the vision of any individual community; it is a framework for addressing common issues. Metro Vision is sensitive to the decisions local governments make in determining when and where growth will occur. Metro Vision also recognizes that each community has its own view of growth.

Metro Vision encourages communities to work together.

The impacts of growth don't recognize jurisdictional boundaries and it is important for jurisdictions to address growth collaboratively. Metro Vision provides the framework for doing that; DRCOG provides the forum.

Metro Vision is dynamic and flexible.

Metro Vision reflects contemporary perspectives on the future of the region and is updated as conditions and priorities change. The DRCOG Board makes minor revisions to the plan annually and major updates occur every four years.

The *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* has several distinct elements with associated visions and goals for growth and development, environmental quality, and transportation (see Chapter 4).

B. Growth and Development Elements

The growth and development visions and goals are as follows:

1. Extent of Urban Development Vision. A defined urban growth boundary/area (UGB/A) will promote an orderly, compact, and efficient pattern of future development within the region. Focusing development within the growth boundary/area will prevent the unnecessary and inefficient extension of roads, transit services, water, and wastewater treatment plants. It will reduce regional vehicle travel, help achieve greater density, conserve open land outside the boundary/area, and separate communities.

Goal: Ensure that urban development occurs within a defined urban growth boundary/area to promote an orderly, compact, and efficient pattern of future development.

The following **extent of development policies** pertain very closely to transportation:

- **Growth Boundary/Area.** The urban growth boundary/area defines where urban development will take place in the region over the next 25 years.
- **Infill and Redevelopment.** Metro Vision encourages local governments to use overlooked vacant parcels and under-developed parcels for infill and redevelopment. Infill and redevelopment can absorb significant population growth and use existing infrastructure more efficiently.
- **Infrastructure.** Metro Vision seeks to direct future urban growth within the UGB/A into areas where infrastructure already exists. In newly urbanized areas, development will be planned to provide infrastructure and services efficiently and cost-effectively. Regional transportation systems should be provided in a way that will most effectively encourage the desired future development.

The 2035 MVRTP is integrated with the UGB/A shown in Figure 8. Planned regional transportation facilities and associated urban improvements and services are concentrated within the UGB/A. Facilities are included in rural areas only if they provide connections between major sections of urban developed land, freestanding communities, or the remainder of the state.

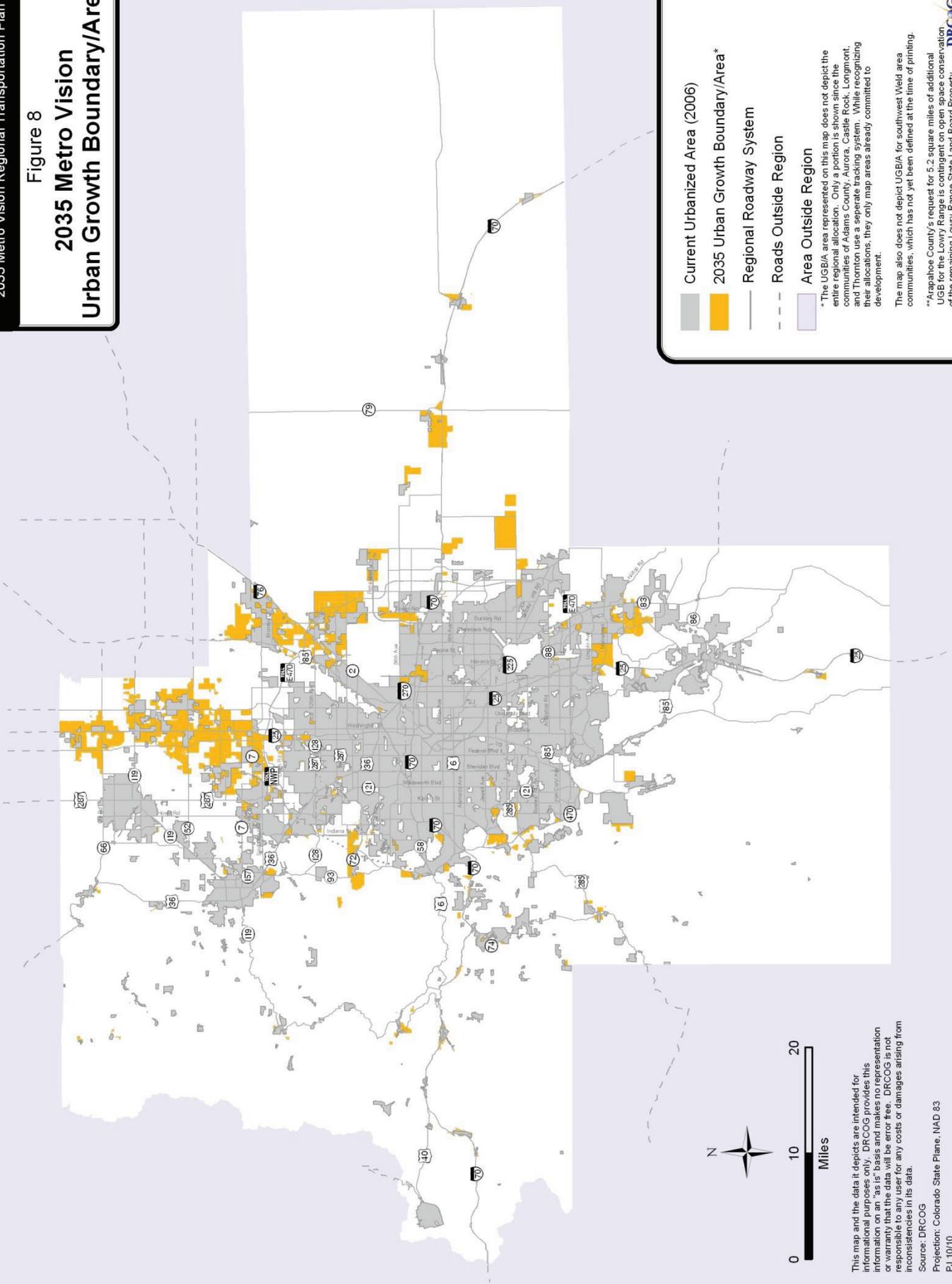
2. Urban Centers Vision. The Denver region will become an international model for healthy, livable communities by developing vibrant urban centers connected by a robust multimodal network throughout the metro area. While each urban center will be unique, all urban centers will:

- Be active, pedestrian-, bicycle-, and transit-friendly places that are more dense and mixed in use than surrounding areas;
- Allow people of all ages, incomes, and abilities to access a range of housing, employment, and service opportunities without sole reliance on having to drive;
- Promote regional sustainability by reducing per capita vehicle miles traveled, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption; and
- Respect and support existing neighborhoods.

Goal: Urban Centers will accommodate 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new employment between 2005 and 2035.

Figure 8

2035 Metro Vision Urban Growth Boundary/Area



- Current Urbanized Area (2006)
- 2035 Urban Growth Boundary/Area*
- Regional Roadway System
- - - Roads Outside Region
- Area Outside Region

* The UGB/A area represented on this map does not depict the entire regional allocation. Only a portion is shown since the communities of Adams County, Aurora, Castle Rock, Longmont, and Thornton use a separate tracking system. While recognizing their allocations, they only map areas already committed to development.

The map also does not depict UGB/A for southwest Weld area communities, which has not yet been defined at the time of printing.

**Arapahoe County's request for 5.2 square miles of additional UGB for the Lowry Range is contingent on open space conservation of the remaining Lowry Range State Land Board Property.



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Source: DRCOG
 Projection: Colorado State Plane, NAD 83
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The following **urban centers policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Location.** Metro Vision encourages the development of urban centers at infill and redevelopment sites within the UGB/A throughout the metro area, while recognizing the unique significance of the Denver central business district. Metro Vision prioritizes urban centers around existing or proposed rapid transit stations or with high-frequency bus service.
- **Multimodal Connectivity.** Urban centers will have high levels of internal connectivity and will be well-connected to the region at large, and
- **Transportation Options.** Modes such as walking, bicycling and transit will be equally competitive with driving within urban centers.

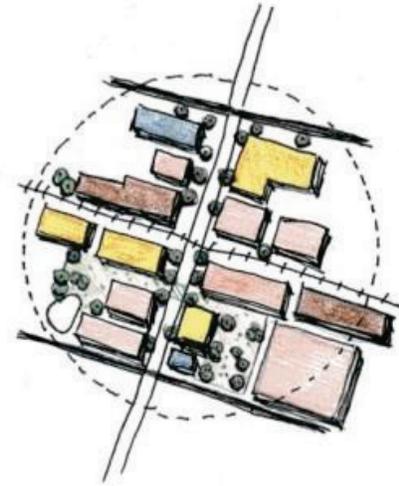
Urban centers is a general term applied to three specific types of centers: mixed-use centers, activity centers, and regional corridors. Figure 9 displays the three types of urban centers. Figure 10 shows the location of the urban centers.

The 2035 MVRTP identifies many major transportation improvements that will support the development of urban centers. It emphasizes providing accessibility to and within urban centers through multimodal travel options, notably non-driving alternatives. The majority of urban centers are located within the major corridors that are the foundation for the plan. When improvements to be included in the *Fiscally Constrained 2035 RTP* were defined, their relationship to urban centers was a key consideration as it will be for future Transportation Improvement Programs. The urban centers support the transportation system by lessening the demand to make automobile trips and potentially reducing the length of trips.

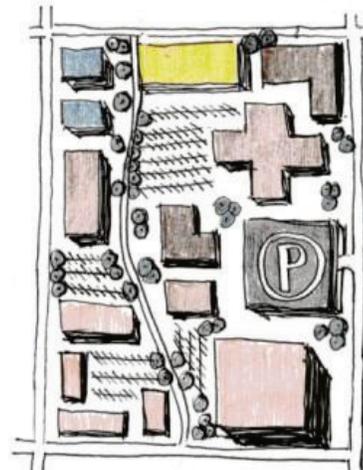
Figure 9

Urban Centers

- *Mixed-use centers* are envisioned as high-intensity, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use locations, providing a range of retail, business, civic and residential opportunities for the surrounding trade area.



- *Activity centers* are similar, but focused mostly on employment. They may not contain the same mix of uses, particularly residential.

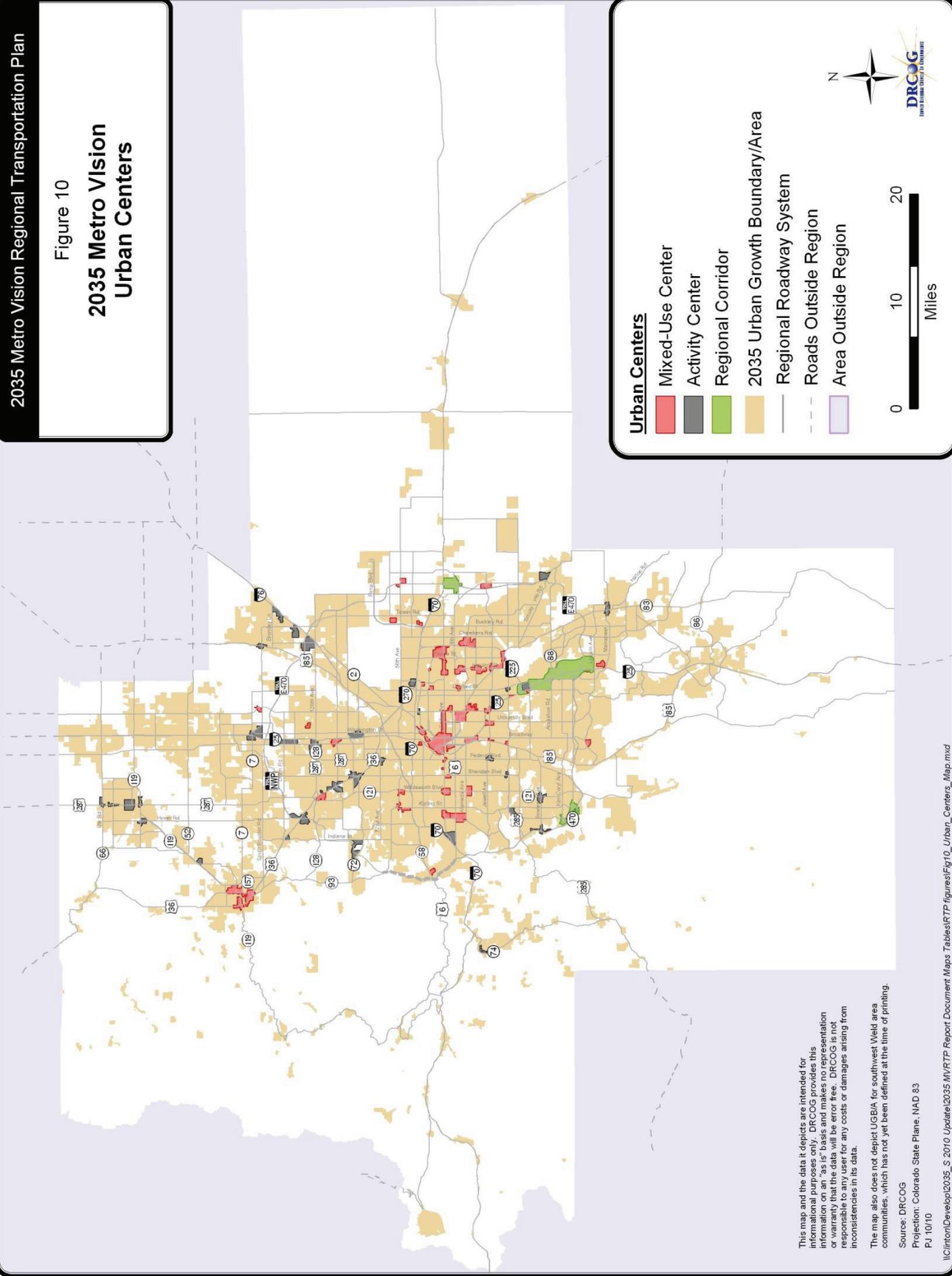


- *Regional corridors* have some residential components, but are distinguished by their larger size, linear characteristics and adjacency to major transportation corridors. Regional corridors can be thought of as a series of interconnected urban centers.



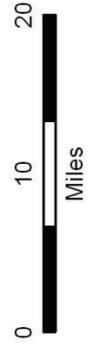
Figure 10

**2035 Metro Vision
Urban Centers**



Urban Centers

- Mixed-Use Center
- Activity Center
- Regional Corridor
- 2035 Urban Growth Boundary/Area
- Regional Roadway System
- Roads Outside Region
- Area Outside Region



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Source: DRCOG
 Projection: Colorado State Plane, NAD 83
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3. Freestanding Communities Vision. The outlying communities of Boulder, Brighton, Castle Rock and Longmont will continue to be distinguished by their historic town centers, their separation from the larger urban area, and their capacity to absorb future population and employment growth. These communities will continue to develop in a way that enhances their self-sufficiency. Each will remain separate from the larger urban area, surrounded by an open space or rural buffer, and have an adequate mix of jobs and housing, an internal transportation system with regional transportation connections, and a town center at its core.

Goal: Maintain Boulder, Brighton, Castle Rock and Longmont as distinct and self-sufficient communities, separate from the larger urban area.

The following freestanding **community policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Physical Separation.** Freestanding communities will establish a permanent open space or rural buffer to maintain physical separation from the larger urban area and retain a sense of community identity. Highway interchanges or transit stations will be located away from buffer areas to avoid development pressure.
- **Transportation.** Multimodal transportation systems will be developed in each freestanding community. These systems will include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and internal and external transit services. Communities will be linked to the larger metropolitan area with rapid transit and highway facilities.

The 2035 MVRTP facilitates the provision of multimodal transportation improvements and services within the freestanding communities to reduce the need for making trips by automobile.

Multimodal connections between the freestanding communities and the larger urban area are provided via rapid transit lines, bicycle corridors, and highways. Access to such connecting highways should be limited to discourage development.

4. Rural Town Centers Vision. Small, established towns and villages found in rural places beyond the region's urban area will provide services, employment and entertainment for residents of the surrounding trade area, as well as tourists and travelers. Although they will serve the rural area, the communities themselves will be relatively compact, with a town center, small lots, and a street grid. They also will have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate population growth.

Goal: Recognize the small communities located in the rural and semi-urban areas of our region and more clearly define and support their regional role.

The 2035 MVRTP recognizes the unique character of rural town centers and the importance of preserving their character through the sensitive design of transportation facilities located in the towns. The provision of pedestrian-friendly facilities is critical to such preservation. Maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure is important within these towns as new or expanded facilities are not likely to be built.

5. Large-Lot Development Vision: A limited amount of low-density large-lot development, either semi-urban or semi-rural in character, will continue to occur beyond the urban area, contributing to the region's diversity of land uses. Careful planning will minimize its financial, environmental and visual impacts. Special care will be taken to avoid developing in potential future open space areas. Semi-urban development, in particular, will be planned to avoid interfering with the urban area's logical future expansion beyond 2035.

Goal: Manage the extent of low-density, large-lot development occurring on the periphery of the urban area consistent with Metro Vision's stated policies.

The following **large-lot development policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Infrastructure Investment.** The priority for investing regional funds in transportation infrastructure and other services is the urbanized area within the urban growth boundary/area. Regional funds should, in general, not be expended to serve large-lot development.
- **Financial Accountability.** To the extent practical, local jurisdictions should ensure that large-lot development, like all development, pays its own way.

The 2035 MVRTP provides limited transportation facilities and services in the areas of the region with large-lot development. They are provided in these areas solely to connect major sections of urban developed land and to enable connections to be made to the remainder of the state. Very limited transit service is envisioned for the large-lot development areas.

6. Community Design Vision. Communities will accommodate the transportation, housing, social, economic, environmental, health, recreational and service needs of a growing and aging population through sustainable development patterns and community design. The successful integration of multimodal transportation and land use will create healthy communities that provide for people of all ages, incomes and abilities. Communities will pay particular attention to the needs of older adults, which represent the fastest growing segment of the population.

Goal: Promote development patterns and community design features that meet the needs of people of all ages, incomes, and abilities while supporting a variety of Metro Vision goals including:

- *Locate 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new employment within urban centers*
- *Reduce the percent of trips to work by single-occupant vehicle to 65 percent by 2035*
- *Reduce regional per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) 10 percent by 2035*
- *Reduce per capita greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector 60 percent by 2035*
- *Reduce per capita municipal and industrial water use 13.5 percent by 2030*

The following **community design policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Density.** Promote development densities that make walking, bicycling or taking transit viable options to reduce reliance on the automobile and enhancing the independence of people who prefer not to drive or are unable to because of age, income or ability.
- **Distance-to-Transit.** Allow for transit use and increase the mobility of transit-dependent populations by promoting higher density development, including housing that is suitable for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities within a half-mile walking distance of transit.
- **Development Patterns.** Promote human-scaled development (as opposed to auto-oriented) patterns that are easy to navigate and enhance multimodal connectivity and maximize the ability of all people to access opportunities. Create pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments by providing sidewalks, narrowed street crossings (distance across street), curb ramps, adequate crosswalk signal timing, medians as midway stopping points, traffic calming measures, bicycle and pedestrian access to transit facilities, and improved bike paths and trail systems. Establish “level-of-service” standards for pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- **Universal Design.** Create built environments that enable the widest spectrum of people, regardless of age, income or ability, to more easily participate in community life. Design civic buildings and spaces that are accessible to all people, ensure safety and comfort, support wayfinding, facilitate social interaction and can be easily adapted to meet changing needs. Increase the supply of housing that allows older adults and persons with disabilities to easily live in and visit homes.

Transportation facilities and services are very important to the senior population and are recognized by the 2035 MVRTP. Several key factors must be considered in future improvement studies and maintenance activities. Street signs must be clearly visible to drivers with visual impairments. Pedestrian treatments such as crosswalks must be designed to accommodate those who walk slower, use wheelchairs, or are visually impaired. There will be a greater demand for door-to-door specialized transit services. Rapid transit rail lines provide an attractive service that is perceived as being safer and more dependable than bus service to many seniors.

C. Environmental Elements

1. Parks and Open Space Vision. By 2035, the region will have protected its major natural resource areas, including the mountain backdrop, riparian corridors, and other key open space and wildlife habitat. Several key working farms and ranches adjacent to the urban area will be preserved. Recreational areas in both developed parks and passive open space will be readily available and accessible to the region's residents. The region's open space will help define the urban area and separate communities.

Goal: Establish an integrated, linked, permanent parks and open space system that will include a variety of open space and make appropriate open space accessible to all of the region's population.

The following **parks and open space policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Recreation.** The physical and aesthetic enjoyment of the out-of-doors will be provided for in an integrated regional parks and open space system.
- **Trails Network.** Metro Vision calls for an areawide trails network to link open space and provide access. This network should take full advantage of all potential connections, including road and railroad rights-of-way, floodplains, ditch service roads and utility corridors.

Figure 11 shows the key parks and open space features for the region.

Transportation facilities provide access to and, in many instances, within the region's key outdoor recreational destinations. Several types of transportation facilities, including roadways, transit routes, and multipurpose trails, will provide access to parks and open space. Parks and open space will affect the design and alignment of transportation improvements identified in the 2035 MVRTP.

2. Water Quality Vision. As a semi-arid region, the Denver area values its water resources. Metro Vision seeks to ensure that, to the extent possible, every stream, lake and reservoir will be fishable and swimmable. The Colorado Water Quality Control Commission identifies standards for the anticipated uses of water resources in the state. These standards will be achieved to protect water quality.

Goal: Restore and maintain the chemical and physical integrity of the region's waters to ensure clean water for residents and a balanced, healthy, ecological community.

The following **water quality policy** pertains closely to transportation:

- **Nonpoint Sources.** Local actions will reduce pollution from stormwater and other nonpoint sources. All development in the region should follow adopted grading, erosion, and sediment control ordinances to minimize sediment and other pollutant runoff into the region's waters.

The 2035 MVRTP notes that transportation facilities such as roadways and parking lots increase the area of impervious surface. As impervious area increases, runoff is transmitted more rapidly and in greater volumes to streams and waterbodies. Roadway designs in particular must consider the associated volume of stormwater and sediment runoff. Sediments such as brake dust, rubber tire particles, and road sand harm adjacent streams if not adequately contained.

3. Air Quality Vision. Growth, land development and regional transportation have a significant effect on the region's air quality. The region will develop in a way that reduces growth in transportation-related air pollution. Metro Vision's development pattern will reduce growth in vehicle trips and miles of travel. Slowing the expansion of the urban area, supporting mixed, higher-intensity land uses, and increasing density around mass transit will be key urban development strategies to increase transit usage. Helping freestanding communities become more self-sufficient will also help contain the growth of vehicle trips and miles of travel. Because regional air quality is closely linked to automobile emissions, it will be critical to provide alternatives to the private passenger vehicle, as proposed in the regional transportation plan.

Goal: Protect human health and environmental quality by achieving and maintaining national ambient air quality standards.

The following **air quality policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Mobile Sources.** Metro Vision calls for reducing growth in mobile-source air pollution emissions by providing travel alternatives, improving the efficiency of the regional

transportation network, and changing key features of the development pattern. In combination, these will help achieve national, state and regional air quality objectives.

- **Accessibility.** Metro Vision encourages local communities to modify their local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to improve community accessibility and provide additional pedestrian, bicycle and transit travel opportunities.

Motor vehicles are acknowledged in the 2035 MVRTTP as a significant source of the region's air pollutants. The plan identifies many important efforts to reduce such pollutants by providing alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel and by implementing traffic management strategies to increase the efficiency of roadways and transit service. The *Fiscally Constrained 2035 RTP* component has been found to conform to applicable air quality standards.

4. Noise Vision. Excessive noise is a nuisance and a potential public health concern. It can also impact property values and destabilize neighborhoods. Metro Vision seeks to ensure that the residents of the Denver region will have minimal exposure to excessive noise levels associated with roadways, trains, aviation, commercial and industrial land uses, special events, and temporary construction activity. Minimizing this exposure will help preserve the region's quality of life.

Goal: Minimize exposure to excessive noise levels associated with land use and transportation activities.

The following **noise policies** pertain closely to transportation:

- **Location and Mitigation.** Metro Vision calls on the region to ensure that new or expanded regional transportation facilities are located and designed to maintain acceptable noise levels. That includes considering adjacent land uses and using appropriate mitigation measures (e.g., landscaping, noise barriers, traffic control and other noise-attenuating techniques).
- **Airport Noise.** Metro Vision calls for minimizing noise exposure around airports, consistent with Federal Aviation Administration policies and local airport noise standards.
- **New Development.** Metro Vision recommends locating new noise-sensitive development away from planned or existing major noise sources such as airports and freeways.

Motor vehicle noise is the most common and widely dispersed continuous noise source in the Denver region. The roadways that generate the most noise are those with the highest speeds and greatest traffic volumes such as freeways and major regional arterials. Transit facilities such as light rail also generate noise that can impact communities.

Ideally, transportation facilities should be separated from noise-sensitive land uses, but that is not always possible. The 2035 MVRTP will expect new, or improved, transportation facilities to mitigate their noise impacts. DRCOG's *Airport Compatible Land Use Design Handbook* provides guidelines for addressing airport noise.