# "The Next American Metropolis"

## from *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream* (1993)

Peter Calthorpe

## Editors' Introduction

In the early twentieth century, urban thinkers often focused on improving the physical form of the city, with specific proposals for new towns, improved neighborhoods, and dispersion of population from overcrowded industrial cities into regional constellations of communities. This tradition of visionary physical planning never entirely disappeared during the middle of the century – figures such as Ian McHarg, American planning consultant Victor Gruen, and Greek visionary Constantine Doxiotis continued to explore new directions – but by and large urban planning became a more pragmatic field built on a foundation of scientific or economic analysis. Planning documents themselves no longer had as many maps, drawings, or graphic visions in them. Instead, many planners opted for the collection of quantitative data on economics, housing, or transportation, and relied on computer models and policy analysis. Some theorists such as University of California at Los Angeles urban geographer Edward Soja have argued that the dimension of "space" itself disappeared from planning discourses. Normative statements about what constitutes good city form also became scarce.

Toward the end of the century the pendulum began to swing back the other way, toward a renewed appreciation of the role of physical planning and urban design. Many observers came to see the need for new types of urban form that would make cities and towns more habitable and ecologically oriented. Strong public movements to manage outward urban expansion ("growth management") and to create more coherent systems of parks, greenways, and open space also emerged. Jane Jacobs helped lay the groundwork for a renewed emphasis on "place-making" with her critique of the sterile, automobile-oriented urban landscapes created by much mid-twentieth-century modernist architecture and urban renewal. What was important, in her view, was the day-to-day life and vitality of urban places. MIT planning professor Kevin Lynch also helped catalyze a new interest in normative urban design values with books such as *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), which analyzed the physical form of human settlements throughout history and arrived at a set of design principles that Lynch argued were important for livable cities. University of California at Berkeley architecture professor Christopher Alexander and his colleagues likewise sought to determine features of what they called "the timeless way of building," and in their book *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) set forth a list of fifty characteristics of good urban form throughout history that they argued could be combined to produce livable places.

These and other writers helped lay the groundwork for renewed attention to ways of creating livable, walkable places, but the leading movement in terms of actually changing community form came to be called the

New Urbanism. This philosophy emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a number of architects and planners sought ways to create neighborhoods that emulated features of the traditional American small town. Early on, leaders of the movement used terms such as "traditional neighborhood design" to describe their work, and adopted many design concepts from towns laid out a hundred years before such as grid-like street networks, mid-block alleys, village centers with small shops and workplaces, front porches, and garages at the rear of houses rather than in the front. (If these designers had used European small towns as a model instead, they might well have gravitated toward more winding, organic street patterns and more urban housing forms.)

Miami-based architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (designers of new communities such as Seaside and Kentlands), Bay Area-based designer Peter Calthorpe (designer of Laguna West and regional planning consultant for Portland, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Chicago), and Los Angeles-based designers Stefanos Polyzoides and Elizabeth Moule were among the founders of the new movement. By taking the name Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), they consciously positioned themselves as an alternative to the 1930s modernist architectural movement known as the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). The CNU held its first annual Congress in Alexandria, Virginia in 1993, and issued a Charter for the New Urbanism in 1996 (San Francisco: Congress for the New Urbanism, 2000). By the turn of the millennium several hundred New Urbanist-inspired neighborhoods were under construction in North America, both on infill locations (within existing urban areas) and greenfield sites (unbuilt open land at the urban fringe). Equally importantly, New Urbanist design principles were diffusing into planning and design professions throughout the world. In Britain, Prince Charles' Prince of Wales Institute served as a vehicle for promoting similar types of urban design, and on the continent architects such as Rob and Leon Krier designed relatively dense new urban additions to existing cities. Many New Urbanist projects may be seen as promoting sustainability, in that they help produce more compact, pedestrian-oriented, resource-efficient urban communities. However, they can also be criticized on various grounds, such as for not providing enough affordable housing, not using green architecture or landscaping principles, or at times for being built on inappropriate locations outside of existing urban areas.

The move to rethink land-use planning and urban design has been strengthened by a wide variety of urban growth management efforts in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. These land-use planning initiatives have sought to deal with a problem unforeseen by early twentieth-century urban thinkers – rapid suburban sprawl made possible in large part by the automobile. In the United States, states such as Oregon, Vermont, Florida, and New Jersey first passed growth management legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, is some cases requiring local governments to plan urban growth boundaries (UGBs) or to limit expansion of urban services such as water and sewer utilities. Additional states such as Washington, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, and Pennsylvania launched initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s, often under the banner of "smart growth." The smart growth movement borrowed many principles from the New Urbanism but focusing also on reducing infrastructure costs and creating a fairer distribution of affordable housing. Smart growth efforts have been resisted by many local governments, landowners, developers, and property rights advocates. Libertarians and free-market economists have argued that people choose to live in automobile-oriented, sprawling suburbs, that compact development is not a cure for traffic congestion, and that supposedly sprawling cities such as Los Angeles actually have higher residential densities than do growth management models such as Portland. Growth management proponents reply that citizens have little choice but to live in sprawl, that the housing market has been distorted for many years by public and private subsidies for sprawl, that traffic can be reduced only through a combination of policies including better pricing and transportation alternatives as well as better land use, and that "sprawl" consists of many factors beyond sheer population density. For a good example of this debate see Peter Gordon and Harry Richardson's article "Are compact cities a desirable planning goal?" (*Journal of the American Planning Association*, 63(1), 1997, pp. 95–107) and Reid Ewing's response "Is Los Angeles-style sprawl desirable?" (same issue, pp. 107–127). Whatever the exact outcome of these arguments, it is clear to many these days that new approaches to physical planning are necessary for sustainable urban development.

Calthorpe, one of the leading New Urbanists, may be seen as an heir to Howard and Mumford in that through his regional and neighborhood planning work he has sought to develop a new version of the city–country balance. The co-editor (with ecological architect Sim Van der Ryn) of an earlier book entitled *Sus-*

*tainable Communities* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), Calthorpe later sought a more pragmatic synthesis of pedestrian-oriented planning principles that could be adopted by the mainstream development industry. In works such *as The Next American Metropolis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993) and *The Regional City* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001; with William Fulton), he has sought to promote co-ordinated physical planning changes on neighborhood, city, and regional scales. Calthorpe has also been a leading proponent of "transit-oriented development," clustering communities around a regional network of rail transit stations.

One of the greatest contributions of Calthorpe and other New Urbanists has been to develop consensus on specific design guidelines and place-making strategies. Calthorpe's graphics in this book represent some of these principles. More are provided by other New Urbanist designers such as Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck in their book *Suburban Nation* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), and by organizations such as the Congress for the New Urbanism (www.cnu.org), the Sacramento-based Local Government Commission (www.lgc.org), and the Smart Growth Network (www.smartgrowth.org).

Although he speaks primarily to an American audience and talks of redefining the "American Dream," it is important to realize that Calthorpe is talking about a mode of development which has become common the world over – a suburban world of cul-de-sacs, detached single-family houses, single-use zoning, and dependence on automobiles. This "dream" is now sought with increasing frequency in Indonesia, South Africa, The Netherlands, Mexico, eastern Europe, and countless other locations. Reasons for this include omnipresent American television, movies, and popular culture, the power of multinational corporations and their advertising to promote materialist lifestyles, and the employment of American planning consultants throughout the world.

The American Dream is an evolving image and the American Metropolis is its ever-changing reflection. The two feed one another in a complex, interactive cycle. At one point a dream moves us to a new vision of the city and community, at another the reflection of the city transforms that dream with harsh realities or alluring opportunities. We are at a point of transformation once again and the two, city and dream, are changing together. World War II created a distinct model for each: the nuclear family in the suburban landscape. That model and its physical expression is now stressed beyond retention. The family has grown more complex and diverse, while the suburban form has grown more demanding and less accessible. The need for change is blatant, with sprawl reaching its limits, communities fracturing into enclaves, and families seeking more inclusive identities. Clearly we need a new paradigm of development; a new vision of the American Metropolis and a new image for the American Dream.

The old suburban dream is increasingly out of sync with today's culture. Our household makeup has changed dramatically, the work place and work force have been transformed, average family wealth is shrinking, and serious environmental concerns have surfaced. But we continue to build post-World War II suburbs as if families were large and had only one breadwinner, as if the jobs were all downtown, as if land and energy were endless, and as if another lane on the freeway would end traffic congestion.

Over the last 20 years these patterns of growth have become more and more dysfunctional. Finally they have come to produce environments which often frustrate rather than enhance everyday life. Suburban sprawl increases pollution, saps inner-city development, and generates enormous costs – costs which ultimately must be paid by taxpayers, consumers, businesses, and the environment. These problems are not to be solved by limiting the scope, program, or location of development – they must be resolved by rethinking the nature and quality of growth itself, in every context.

This book attempts to map out a new direction for growth in the American Metropolis. It borrows from many traditions and theories: from the romantic environmentalism of Ruskin to the City Beautiful Movement, from the medieval urbanism of Sitte to the Garden Cities of Europe, from streetcar suburbs to the traditional towns of America, and from the theories of Jane Jacobs to those of Leon Krier. It is a work which has evolved from theory to practice in some of our fastest

growing cities and regions. It is a search for a paradigm that combines the utopian ideal of an integrated and heterogeneous community with the realities of our time – the imperatives of ecology, affordability, equity, technology, and the relentless force of inertia. The work asserts that our communities must be designed to reestablish and reinforce the public domain, that our districts must be human-scaled, and that our neighborhoods must be diverse in use and population. And finally, that the form and identity of the metropolis must integrate historic context, unique ecologies, and a comprehensive regional structure.

The net result is that we need to start creating neighborhoods rather than subdivisions; urban quarters rather than isolated projects; and diverse communities rather than segregated master plans. Quite simply, we need towns rather than sprawl.

Settlement patterns are the physical foundation of our society and, like our society, they are becoming more and more fractured. Our developments and local zoning laws segregate age groups, income groups, and ethnic groups, as well as family types. Increasingly they isolate people and activities in an inefficient network of congestion and pollution – rather than joining them in diverse and human scaled communities. Our faith in government and the fundamental sense of commonality at the center of any vital democracy is seeping away in suburbs designed more for cars than people, more for market segments than communities. Special interest groups have now replaced citizens in the political landscape, just as gated subdivisions have replaced neighborhoods.

## REDEFINING THE AMERICAN DREAM

It is time to redefine the American Dream. We must make it more accessible to our diverse population: singles, the working poor, the elderly, and the pressed middle-class families who can no longer afford the "Ozzie and Harriet" version of the good life. Certain traditional values – diversity, community, frugality, and human scale – should be the foundation of a new direction for both the American Dream and the American Metropolis. These values are not a retreat to nostalgia or imitation, but a recognition that certain qualities of culture and community are timeless. And that these timeless imperatives must be married to the modern condition in new ways.

The alternative to sprawl is simple and timely: neighborhoods of housing, parks, and schools placed within walking distance of shops, civic services, jobs, and transit – a modern version of the traditional town. The convenience of the car and the opportunity to walk or use transit can be blended in an environment with local access for all the daily needs of a diverse community. It is a strategy which could preserve open space, support transit, reduce auto traffic, and create affordable neighborhoods. Applied at a regional scale, a network of such mixed-use neighborhoods could create order in our balkanized metropolis. It could balance inner-city development with suburban investment by organizing growth around an expanding transit system and setting defensible urban limit lines and greenbelts. The increments of growth in each neighborhood would be small, but the aggregate could accommodate regional growth with minimal environmental impacts; less land consumed, less traffic generated, less pollution produced.

Such neighborhoods, called Pedestrian Pockets or Transit-Oriented Developments, ultimately could be more affordable for working families, environmentally responsible, and cost-effective for business and government. But such a growth strategy will mean fundamentally changing our preconceptions and local regulatory priorities, as well as redesigning the federal programs that shape our cities.

At the core of this alternative, philosophically and practically, is the pedestrian. Pedestrians are the catalyst which makes the essential qualities of communities meaningful. They create the place and the time for casual encounters and the practical integration of diverse places and people. Without the pedestrian, a community's common ground – its parks, sidewalks, squares, and plazas – become useless obstructions to the car. Pedestrians are the lost measure of a community, they set the scale for both center and edge of our neighborhoods. Without the pedestrian, an area's focus can be easily lost. Commerce and civic uses are easily decentralized into distant chain store destinations and government centers. Homes and jobs are isolated in subdivisions and office parks.

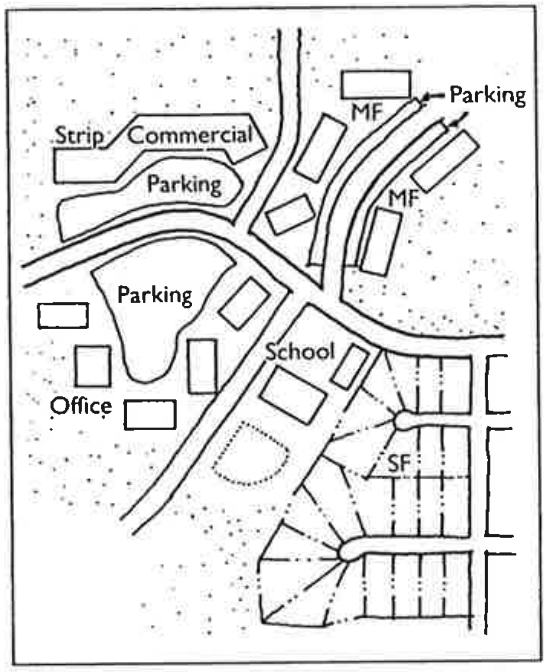
Although pedestrians will not displace the care anytime soon, their absence in our thinking and planning is a fundamental source of failure in our new

developments. To plan as if there were pedestrians may be a self-fulfilling act; it will give kids some autonomy, the elderly basic access, and others the choice to walk again. To plan as if there were pedestrians will turn suburbs into towns, projects into neighborhoods, and networks into communities.

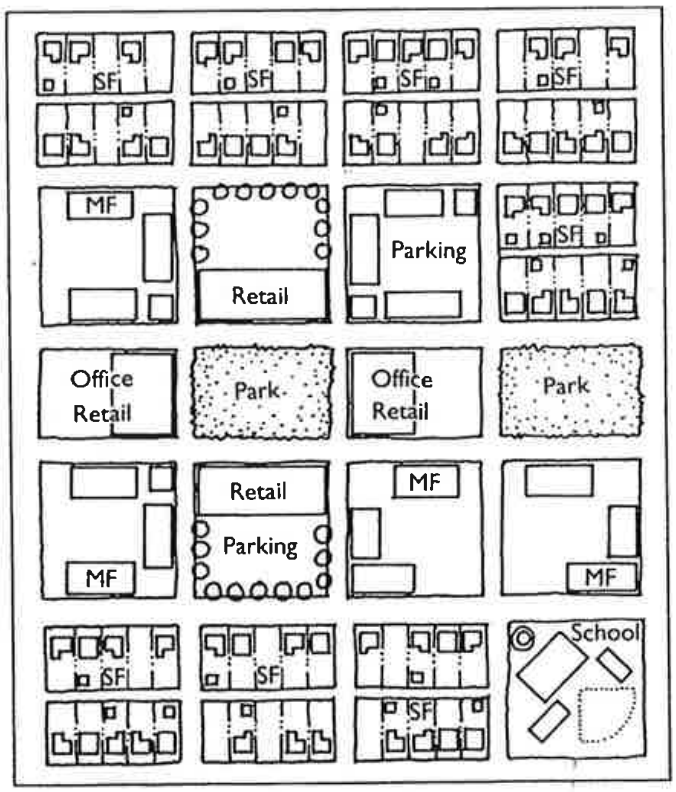
If we are now to reinvest in America, careful consideration should be given to what kind of America we want to create. Our investments in transit must be supported by land use patterns which put riders and jobs within an easy walk of stations. Our investments in affordable housing should place families in neighborhoods where they can save dollars by using their autos less. Our investments in open space should reinforce regional greenbelts and urban limit lines. Our investments in highways should not unwittingly support sprawl, inner-city disinvestments, or random job decentralization. Our investments in inner-cities and urban businesses ought to be linked by transit to the larger region, not isolated by gridlock. Our planning and zoning codes should help create communities, not sprawl.

Is such as transformation possible? Americans love their cars, they love privacy and independence, and they are evolving ever larger institutions. The goal of community planning for the pedestrian or transit is not to eliminate the car, but to balance it. In the 1970s the national love affair with the car was certainly hot, but we traveled on average 50 per cent fewer miles per year than we do now. It *is* possible to accommodate the car and still free pedestrians. Practically, it means narrowing local roads and placing parking to the rear of buildings, not eliminating access for the car. Similarly, the suburban goals of privacy and independence do not have to be abandoned in the interests of developing communities with vital urban centers and neighborly streets. In fact, a walkable neighborhood may produce increased independence for growing segments of the population, the elderly and kids. The scale of our institutions may no longer fit the human scale proportions of an old village, but with careful design they could be integrated into mixed-use communities. Large businesses are quickly becoming aware of the benefits of being part of a neighborhood rather than an office park, with shared amenities and local services topping the list.

This new balance calls for the integration of seemingly opposing forces. Community and privacy,




CONVENTIONAL SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT




TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**Figure 1.** Conventional suburban development vs. traditional neighborhood development.

auto and pedestrian, large institution and small business, suburban and urban; these are the poles that must be fused in a new pattern of growth. The design imperatives of creating the post-suburban metropolis are complex and challenging. They are to develop a regional growth strategy which integrates social diversity, environmental protection, and transit; create an architecture that reinforces the public domain without sacrificing the variety and character of individual buildings; advance a planning approach that reestablishes the pedestrian in mixed-use, livable communities; and evolve a design philosophy that is capable of accommodating modern institutions without sacrificing human scale and memorable places.

## DEFINITIONS

### Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a mixed-use community within an average 2,000-foot walking distance of a transit stop and core commercial area. TODs mix residential, retail, office, open space, and public uses in a walkable environment, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle, foot, or car.

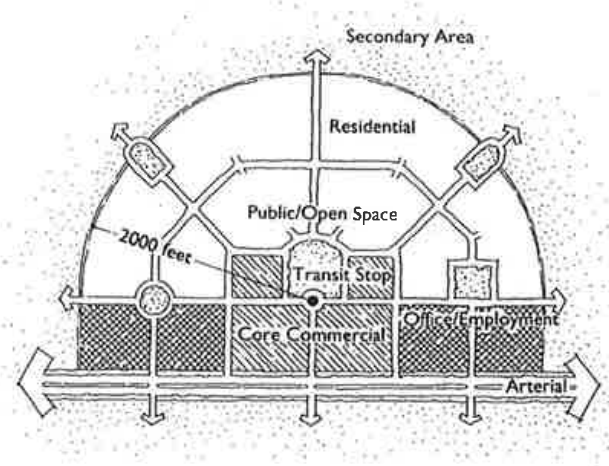



Figure 2. Transit-Oriented Development.

### Residential areas

TOD residential areas include housing that is within a convenient walking distance from core commercial areas and transit stops. Residential density requirements should be met with a mix of housing types, including small lot single-family, townhomes, condominiums, and apartments.

### Secondary areas

Each TOD may have a Secondary Area adjacent to it, including areas across and arterial, which are no further than one mile from the core commercial area. The Secondary Area street network must provide multiple direct street and bicycle connections to the transit stop and core commercial area, with a minimum of arterial crossings. Secondary Areas may have lower density single-family housing, public schools, large community parks, low intensity employment-generating uses, and park-and-ride lots.

### Relationship to transit and circulation

The site must be located on an existing or planned trunk transit line or on a feeder bus route within 10 minutes transit travel time from a stop on the trunk line. Where transit may not occur for a period


Figure 3. Housing types.

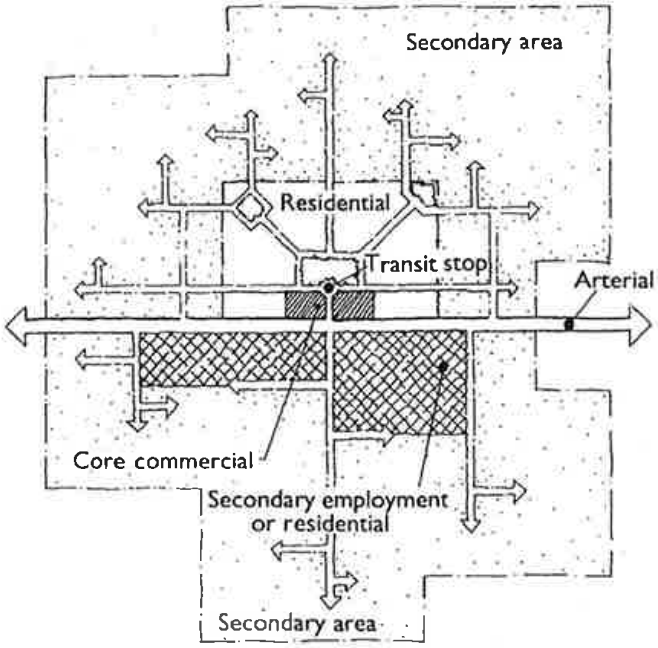



Figure 4. Secondary areas.

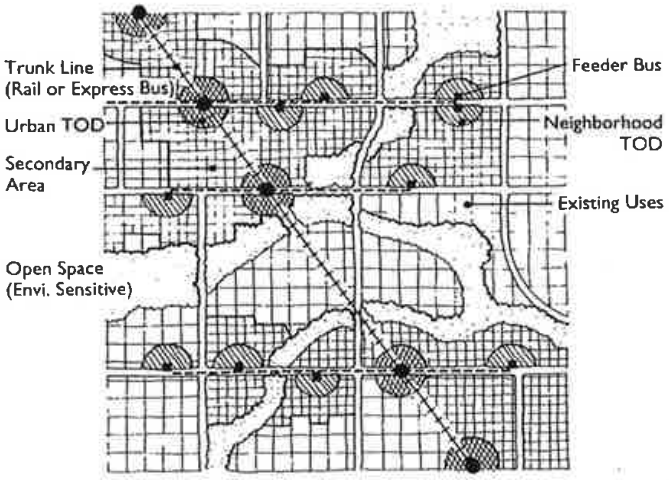



Figure 5. Relationship to transit.

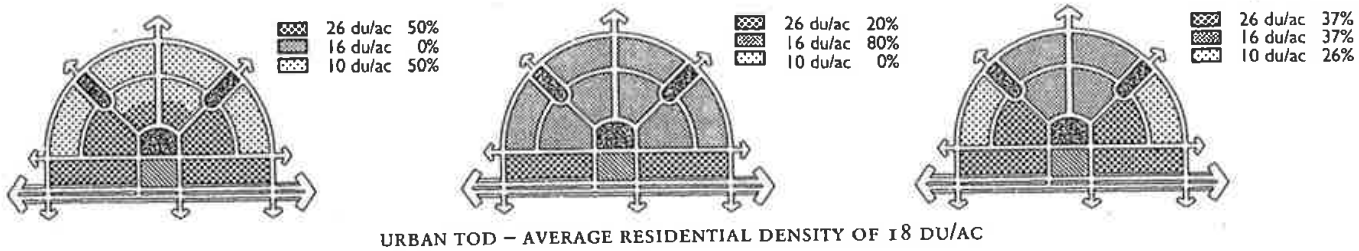



Figure 6. Residential density mix.

of time, the land use and street patterns within a TOD must function effectively in the interim.

## Residential mix

A mix of housing densities, ownership patterns, price, and building types is desirable in a TOD. Average minimum densities should vary between 10 and 25 dwelling units/net residential acre (25 to 62 units/hectare), depending on the relationship to surrounding existing neighborhoods and location within the urban area.

## Street and circulation system

The local street system should be recognizable, formalized, and inter-connected, converging to transit stops, core commercial areas, schools, and

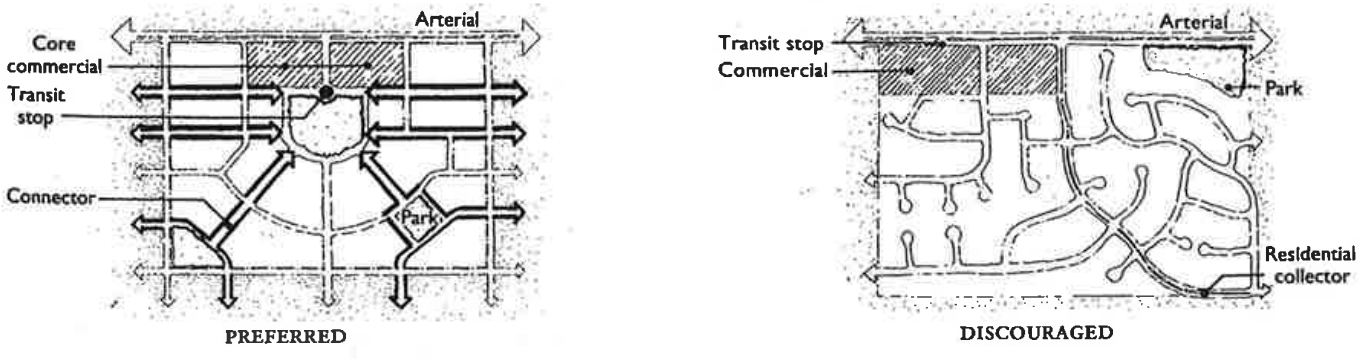



**Figure 7.** Street and circulation system.

parks. Multiple and parallel routes must be provided between the core commercial area, residential, and employment uses so that local trips are not forced onto arterial streets. Streets must be pedestrian friendly; sidewalks, street trees, building entries, and parallel parking must shelter and enhance the walking environment.

## Regional form

Regional form should be the product of transit accessibility and environmental constraints. Major natural resources, such as rivers, bays, ridgelands, agriculture, and sensitive habitat should be preserved and enhanced. An Urban Growth Boundary should be established that provides adequate area for growth while honoring these criteria.

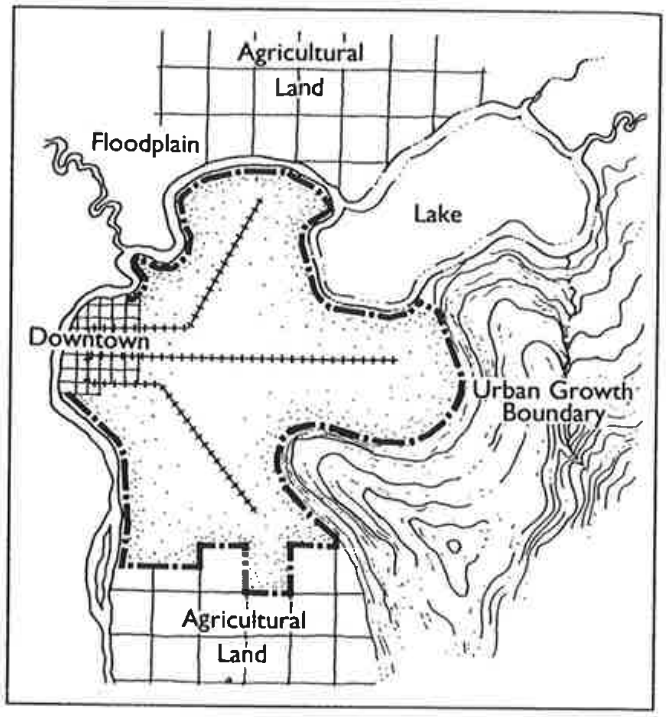



Figure 8. Regional form.