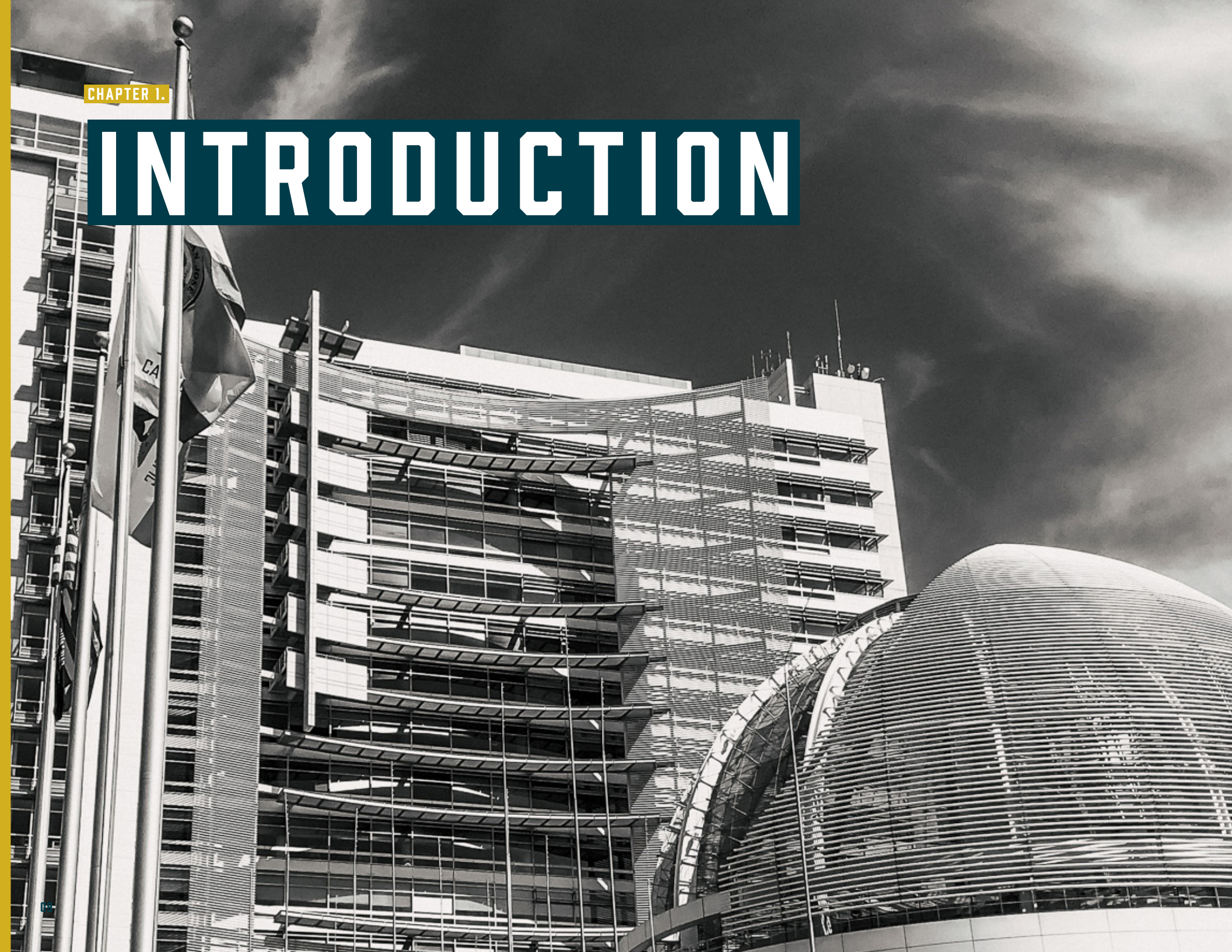


CHAPTER 1.

# INTRODUCTION





# The City of San José wants to build the city of tomorrow with a Downtown for everyone.

## The City envisions a more urban, connected, and livable city by 2040.

Making this a reality requires carefully coordinating public and private investments to create great places. Ground zero for these investments is Downtown, where new and upgraded train lines are being planned to serve a growing city core. A core with many new large mixed-use development projects with vibrant street front retail surrounded by creative public spaces. The many and diverse groups of people who live, work, learn, and play in Downtown deserve clean, safe, affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation options to access the opportunities and resources necessary to thrive, regardless of their race, gender, ability, age, and/or income.

To that end, the City has developed a Downtown Transportation Plan (DTP), a 20-year strategic plan for improving transportation to, from, and within Downtown San José. Developed with the community to support mobility needs and future growth in Downtown, the DTP provides a framework for new transportation projects, programs, and policies to be implemented by 2040.

The DTP aims to complement other major downtown efforts to elevate Downtown San José's position as a premier regional destination for jobs, housing, retail, and cultural activities.

For purposes of the DTP, Downtown San José, or Downtown for short, is defined as not only the traditional Downtown core but also neighborhoods adjacent to the core that are included in the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)'s [Transit-Rich Priority Development Areas](#) – Greater Downtown and Downtown “Frame” areas. These are places near public transit planned for new homes, jobs, and community amenities. Downtown San José is bounded by the Spartan-Keyes neighborhood to the south, Japantown to the north, San José State University to the east, and Diridon Station-St. Leo's-Cahill Park areas to the west. In addition, the DTP recognizes that transportation crosses the formal study boundaries of this Plan. As such, the DTP also considers the needs of nearby neighborhoods outside of Downtown.





**THE ALAMEDA**

**ST. LEO'S**

**CAHILL PARK**

**PARKSIDE**

**DELMAS PARK**

**GARDNER**

**CALLE WILLOW**

**AUTUMN - MONTGOMERY**

**LITTLE ITALY**

**SAN PEDRO SQUARE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE**

**SOFA**

**WASHINGTON - GUADALUPE**

**SPARTAN - KEYES**

**RYLAND**

**NORTH SAN PEDRO**

**SAN PEDRO SQUARE**

**LITTLE ITALY**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE**

**SOFA**

**PARKSIDE**

**DELMAS PARK**

**GARDNER**

**CALLE WILLOW**

**JAPANTOWN**

**HENSLEY**

**NORTH SAN PEDRO**

**SAN PEDRO SQUARE**

**LITTLE ITALY**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE**

**SOFA**

**PARKSIDE**

**DELMAS PARK**

**GARDNER**

**CALLE WILLOW**

**HORACE MANN**

**SAN PEDRO SQUARE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE**

**SOFA**

**PARKSIDE**

**DELMAS PARK**

**GARDNER**

**WASHINGTON - GUADALUPE**

**CALLE WILLOW**

**SOUTH UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD (SUN)**

**VIRGINIA - MARTHA**

**SPARTAN - KEYES**

**JULIAN - ST. JAMES**

**SAN PEDRO SQUARE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE**

**SOFA**

**PARKSIDE**

**DELMAS PARK**

**GARDNER**

**WASHINGTON - GUADALUPE**

**CALLE WILLOW**







# HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION

To improve the transportation system in Downtown, one must first understand how the city developed and evolved.



## PRE-1700s

San José sits on the lands of the First Nation Peoples of the San Francisco Bay Area. Early inhabitants of the land traveled using systems of trails connecting tribal centers. Later, non-native settlers associated with the California missions colonized the area around Downtown San José, which afforded easy access to the nearby Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek.

## 1800s

The period brought an increase in farming to the areas around Downtown, which led to growth in San José and additional roads being constructed. Rail service connecting to San Francisco along what is today the Caltrain corridor began in 1864. Showcasing its early reputation as a center for innovation with its electric light tower, in 1881 the city earned the distinction of being the only electrified city west of the Rocky Mountains. Electric streetcars began to serve downtown, and many streets became busy transit corridors. In 1938, the streetcars were removed to make way for bus lines and cars.

## LATE 1700s



A system of roads was constructed to provide access to other settlements, including Mission Santa Clara to the west. San José was also located along the El Camino Real, a road that connected the many missions and trading posts of Spanish settlers. Today's Santa Clara Street – Downtown's main drag – is part of the El Camino Real.

## 1950s-1960s

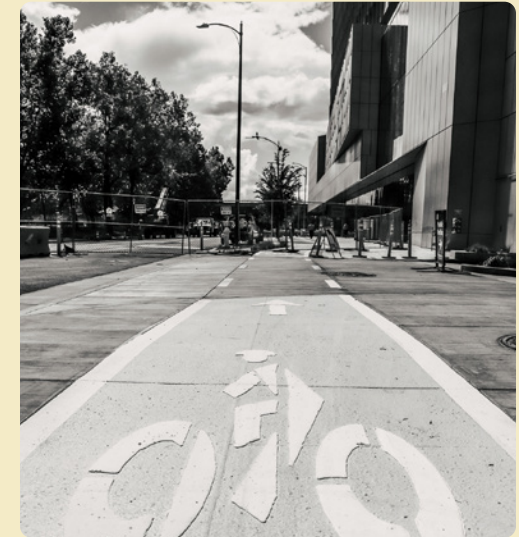
San José grew at an aggressive pace through annexations and by zoning large swaths of land for single-family residential developments. The city expanded geographically as cars became more common. I-280 was constructed in 1955, and SR-87 was constructed over multiple phases between 1960s and 2000s. The freeway construction destroyed numerous homes and businesses in Downtown populated primarily by Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, and low-income families. Neighborhoods that had been “redlined” in the 1930s were bisected by the I-280 construction into the Washington-Guadalupe, Spartan-Keyes, and SUN neighborhoods. Today, these neighborhoods face [extreme displacement risk](#) (Washington-Guadalupe and SUN) or are experiencing [early or ongoing gentrification](#) (Spartan-Keyes), which may lead to displacement if not accompanied by efforts to retain and support them. These neighborhoods also face higher [environmental justice impacts](#), including poor air quality and increased localized air pollution from the freeways, and higher levels of vehicle-related fatalities and injuries.

**CONT. 1950s-1960s**

In the 1960s, San José also converted many two-way streets in Downtown into pairs of high-capacity one-way streets to deal with the heavy traffic as people drove from South San José to North San José through Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. This decision was intended to alleviate congestion in Downtown; however, in practice, it contributed to decades of increased traffic passing through Downtown on these one-way streets, degrading quality of life. Since the mid-1970s, Downtown residents have advocated for converting the one-way couplets back to two-way streets.

**1990s-2000s**

In this period, the City worked aggressively to bring jobs, retail, and housing to Downtown and revitalize a once vibrant central business district. Despite some notable wins such as Adobe's decision to locate its headquarters Downtown in 1996 and the return of City Hall to Downtown in 2005, revitalization was slow and halting. Downtown did not compete well for corporate campuses, retail centers, or high-rise housing, all of which preferred to be situated in other areas of Silicon Valley surrounded by the expanded freeways, higher-income neighborhoods, and free parking.

**2010s**

To accommodate mobility needs while improving the health and safety for its residents, San José adopted the groundbreaking [Envision 2040 General Plan](#), a plan that charted a much more urban and less car-dependent future for a famously sprawling city. Through this Plan, the City committed to a series of efforts to create a sustainable transportation system for all. The efforts began with a [400-mile basic bike network \(now complete\)](#) and a [Vision Zero initiative](#) to reduce and eventually eliminate traffic deaths and severe injuries. The [Guadalupe River Trail](#) was also connected from Alviso at the southern edge of the San Francisco Bay to the Guadalupe River Parks and Gardens in Downtown.

**1970s-1980s**

In 1973, the County of Santa Clara bought out several privately-run bus services and established County Transit (now the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, VTA). In 1987, the VTA light rail began operations in Downtown. But unfortunately, the service never attracted significant ridership as expanded freeways, car-focused street improvements, and sprawling new development undermined transit reliability and ridership. Fewer riders meant less income for the transit operators and consequently less service, which reduced ridership and impacted those who had no other option.



I-280 CONSTRUCTION, 1970 - SOUTH UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD

# DOWNTOWN IN A TIME OF CRISIS

As this plan charts the future of transportation for the next two decades, it is important to acknowledge that Downtown—like many places in the Bay Area and California—faces crises on multiple fronts.

## POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMY

The COVID-19 pandemic allowed many people to rethink their work and personal lives. As many employers adopt a hybrid office model, the restaurants and small businesses in Downtown that used to serve offices buildings where employees previously worked full-time, need to reassess their pre-pandemic economic assumptions. While there may be less commute traffic, streets may be emptier, more shops may struggle to remain in business, and emptier buildings may attract more crime. Some Downtown residents say they stay home more often or visit destinations outside Downtown since they do not feel safe walking on the street.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

San José ranks as one of the most expensive places to live in the country. The City has committed to building 25,000 units by 2023, of which 10,000 are to be affordable. Progress toward this goal has been slow, however, due to uncertainty about the COVID-19 pandemic, halts in construction, high construction costs, high vacancy rates, lack of private investment, and competition for public funding. As housing costs continue to rise, more people are considering moving to outlying communities while continuing to work in Downtown, resulting in longer car commutes.

## UNHOUSED POPULATION

Housing insecurity has also resulted in large numbers of unhoused residents in Downtown. In 2022, there are roughly [6,700 unhoused residents](#) in San José, an increase of more than 50% since 2017. In Downtown, many live near or within transportation facilities, such as the I-280 and SR-87 underpasses, Guadalupe River Trail, transit stations, parking lots, or on the street. These individuals often have few options for getting around, which means that their options for accessing jobs or important services may be limited. The City has made significant investments in permanent supportive and affordable housing as well as emergency and interim housing options. However, it is important that the City expands services to meet the basic health, safety, and mobility needs of the unhoused residents.

## PHYSICAL SAFETY

The physical safety of San José residents, workers, and visitors is the foundation of a thriving and inclusive community where people can entrust their safety both to the City and each other as they walk on the street, take transit, or enjoy public spaces. With crimes like robbery, aggravated assault, and hate crimes being at a [10-year high](#), the City has moved to improve policing practices, service models, and crime prevention strategies.

## TRANSIT RESILIENCY

The transit system is fiscally unsustainable. The primary funding sources for operating VTA and Caltrain services are sales tax and passenger fares, respectively. Since the late 1980s, federal funding has apportioned just 20% of transportation funding for public transit but the rest for highways. Transit that relies heavily on a consumption-based financial model may be susceptible to an economic crisis or a global pandemic and may have to cut service, when some people who rely on public transit may need the service perhaps more so than ever.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Bold actions to tackle the climate crisis are more urgent now than ever before. Record-breaking heat, floods, storms, drought, and wildfires have devastated communities around the world. San José is committed to doing its part to help address the climate crisis by pledging [net-zero annual carbon emissions by 2030](#) and joining the Paris Agreement with its [Climate Smart San José](#) plan. The DTP will play a significant role in helping the City make good on these commitments.



## TURNING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY

The City recognizes this time of crisis and the resulting opportunity to approach the future in a way that supports success for everyone.

Like in the 1950s, Downtown San José is again expected to experience a period of significant growth. A surge of transportation investments of all kinds and new buildings will have a lasting impact on how people get around and where their trips begin and end.

To accommodate shorter trips, the City has planned to expand the citywide bike and trail networks with [550-mile new or upgraded low-stress bike facilities](#) and a [connected Los Gatos Creek Trail](#) (via a combination of off-street trail and on-street connections). [Emerging mobility](#) like electric scooter share, bike share, and people-oriented public spaces are also planned. For longer trips, the street grid in Downtown can be simplified with two-way streets. As [electrified trains](#) are almost ready for operations and the [BART extension to Downtown](#) is going to break ground soon, it is an opportune time to improve the street network by prioritizing transit and people who access it. Electric

vehicles can be used as part of ride-hailing and car share services. Transit and shared mobility can be affordable. Various forms of transportation options can be accessed on demand through a centralized and digital application. The curb can also be optimized to meet the growing demand for uses such as accessible loading, e-commerce package or food deliveries, and parklets.

The DTP attempts to think bold and turn crisis into opportunity. While the DTP is not intended to provide direct solutions for the issues related to affordable housing, unhoused population, physical safety, and post-pandemic economy that go beyond transportation, the plan aims to help address these issues with transportation solutions.\* The 2020s and 2030s can be about creating a resilient multimodal transportation system that helps bring housing, diverse jobs, and retail to Downtown and transforms it into a vibrant central business and social district.

\*City policies that aim to address the housing affordability crisis head-on include the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance and the Commercial Linkage Fee, both of which aim to ensure that affordable housing is built in conjunction with new development.







## PLAN ORGANIZATION

The DTP begins with an introduction about how transportation in Downtown evolved to be as it is and how the DTP can help guide Downtown to a better transportation future. Chapter 2 describes the transportation vision and goals for Downtown. Then, the DTP recommends a total of 17 strategies supported by the Downtown community to achieve the vision and goals. The 17 strategies are split into three categories:

- » Build Complete Street Networks (Chapter 3)
- » Make Big Moves for Public Infrastructure (Chapter 4)
- » Unlock the Value of Mobility for All (Chapter 5)

The DTP ends with an implementation plan in Chapter 6 which describes the steps to advance the 17 transportation strategies and a prioritized list of improvements in Downtown. An implementation process and funding strategies are also identified.