

Metro manages the region's urban growth boundary which separates urban land from rural land.

Under Oregon law, each city or metropolitan area in the state has an urban growth boundary that separates urban land from rural land. Metro is responsible for managing the Portland metropolitan region's urban growth boundary.

What is an urban growth boundary?

The boundary controls urban expansion onto farm and forest lands. Land inside the urban growth boundary supports urban services such as roads, water and sewer systems, parks, schools and fire and police protection that create thriving places to live, work and play. The urban growth boundary is one of the tools used to protect farms and forests from urban sprawl and to promote the efficient use of land, public facilities and services inside the boundary. Other benefits of the boundary include:

- motivation to develop and re-develop land and buildings in the urban core, helping keep core "downtowns" in business
- assurance for businesses and local governments about where to place infrastructure (such as roads and sewers), needed for future development
- efficiency for businesses and local governments in terms of how that infrastructure is built. Instead of building roads further and further out as happens in urban "sprawl," money can be spent to make existing roads, transit service and other services more efficient.

Metro's role

Metro is responsible for managing the Portland metropolitan region's urban growth boundary and is required by state law to have a 20-year supply of land for future residential development inside the boundary. Every five years, the Metro Council is required to conduct a review of the land supply and, if necessary, expand the boundary to meet that requirement. In its 2002 review, the Metro Council also asked technical staff to determine how much land would be required to meet a 20-year land supply for new jobs.

The state Legislature also granted Metro several specific land-use planning powers including:

- coordinating between regional and local comprehensive plans in adopting a regional urban growth boundary
- requiring consistency of local comprehensive plans with statewide and regional planning goals
- planning for activities of metropolitan significance including (but not limited to) transportation, water quality, air quality and solid waste.

The urban growth boundary and Metro's 2040 Growth Concept

The 2040 Growth Concept is our region's growth management policy; it defines development in the metropolitan region through the year 2040. The 2040 Growth Concept guides how the urban growth boundary is managed in order to protect the community characteristics valued by the people who live here, to enhance a transportation system that ensures the mobility of people and goods throughout the region and to preserve access to nature. The 2040 Growth Concept

- encourages efficient land use, directing most development to existing urban centers and along existing major transportation corridors
- promotes a balanced transportation system within the region that accommodates a variety of transportation options such as bicycling, walking, driving and public transit
- supports the region's goal of building complete communities by providing jobs and shopping close to where people live.

Expanding the urban growth boundary

The urban growth boundary was not intended to be static. Since the late 1970s, the boundary has been moved about three dozen times. Most of those moves were small – 20 acres or less. There were three times that Metro authorized more substantial additions:

In 1998, about 3,500 acres were added to make room for approximately 23,000 housing units and 14,000 jobs. Acreage included areas around the Dammasch state hospital site near Wilsonville, the Pleasant Valley area in east Multnomah, the Sunnyside Road area in Clackamas County, and a parcel of land south of Tualatin.

In 1999, another 380 acres were added based on the concept of "subregional need." An example of "subregional need" would occur when a community needed land to balance the number of homes with the number of jobs available in that area.

In 2002, an unprecedented 18,867 acres were added to the urban growth boundary to provide 38,657 housing units and 2,671 acres for additional jobs. This action also created important regional policies to support neighborhoods, protect industrial areas and enhance regional and town centers. These expansions represented an increase of only about 9 percent, even though our population has increased by about 17 percent since 1990.

In 2004, 1,956 acres were added to the boundary to address the need for industrial lands identified as part of the 2002 planning process.

In 2005, the Metro Council added an additional 345 acres of land for industrial purposes which will complete the 2002 planning process.

The origins of Metro's urban growth boundary

The Columbia Region Association of Governments, Metro's predecessor, engaged in a complete planning process and proposed an urban growth boundary for the region in 1977. When Metro was created by voters in 1979, it inherited the boundary planning effort. A year later, the Land Conservation and Development Commission approved the boundary as consistent with statewide planning goals.

The location of the Metro urban growth boundary involved more than simply drawing a line on a map. The plans and growth projections of Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties, along with 24 cities and more than 60 special service districts had to be accommodated. The current urban growth boundary encompasses approximately 400 square miles (about 256,360 acres). As of February 2000, about 1.3 million people lived within the urban growth boundary. The boundary was based on a projection of the need for urban land as well as the land development plans of individual property owners.

An Oregon history of planning for the future

Urban growth boundaries were created as part of the statewide land-use planning program in Oregon in the early 1970s. Gov. Tom McCall and his allies convinced the Oregon Legislature in 1973 to adopt the nation's first set of land-use planning laws. McCall, with the help of a unique coalition of farmers and environmentalists, persuaded the Legislature that the state's natural beauty and easy access to nature would be lost in a rising tide of urban sprawl. The new goals and guidelines required every city and county in Oregon to have a long-range plan addressing future growth that meets both local and statewide goals. In short, state land-use goals require:

- setting urban growth boundaries
- using urban land wisely
- protecting natural resources.

Source: <http://www.metro-region.org/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=277>