

## 5 LAND USE

### THE GOOD NEWS

- *Over 80% of Greater Victoria residents live within 400 m of a bus stop.*
- *About 25% of Greater Victoria residents are within 500 m of a neighbourhood shopping centre.*
- *Greater density in the form of multi-unit housing is helping to reduce our 'ecological footprint'.*

### THE NOT-SO-GOOD NEWS

- *In the rapidly developing West Shore communities, only 7% of residents are within 500 m of neighbourhood centres.*
- *Lands have been removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve at a rate of about 65 ha per year. Food security is an emerging issue requiring protection of local agricultural lands.*

### KEY ACTIONS

**The CRD and member municipalities should:**

- *Promote land use and development that reduces the need for vehicle trips.*
- *Protect agricultural lands and support viable farming.*

The Capital Regional District was home to more than 325,000 people in 2001 and the population is expected to grow to nearly 408,000 by 2026.<sup>39</sup> With this many people sharing an area limited by mountains and sea, the region's land use is not only critical to our environment but important to our economic efficiency and success.

Land use decisions affect the region's environment in many ways. Compact communities make it possible for people to easily walk to the services they need—such as grocery stores, the library, schools and medical services—so they are less likely to use motor vehicles and pollution can be reduced. A compact community can also help build an effective transportation system that features buses, trains, cycling and walking. Protected agricultural land provides fresher food, local jobs and avoids the environmental costs of transporting food over long distances. Concentrating land development allows communities to protect larger natural areas—such as Thetis Lake or Elk Lake—that provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike and refuges for wildlife. Land redevelopment—such as the Selkirk development in Victoria's inner harbour—can help avoid sprawl and its threat to wildlife habitats and rural areas. Our choices matter.



"Close links exist between density and the efficiencies with which land and infrastructure are used and the degree of automobile dependence."

B.C. Sprawl Report 2004



The B.C. Sprawl Report ranked the City of Victoria as #1 (out of the 24 communities studied) in terms of urban form. Its housing density is 48.76 units per hectare, higher than Vancouver's 47.84 units/ha.

<http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/downloads/Sprawl2004.pdf>

The CRD Regional Growth Strategy<sup>40</sup> (adopted in 2003) and the Regional TravelChoices Strategy<sup>41</sup> (adopted in 2005) provide direction on actions to address rapid population growth and the long-term livability of the region and a regional transportation strategy. These strategies address many of the issues discussed in this section.

## MEASURES AND RESULTS

**Ideally, our land use patterns should be:**

- *Compact:* Compactness is a measure of the density of urban development. In a compact community—such as James Bay—houses are close to jobs, shopping, social and recreational opportunities.
- *Connected:* People should be able to easily travel between their home and work, businesses, social and recreational opportunities, with choices other than driving a car.
- *Varied:* There should be a variety of land use types supporting human and wildlife needs.
- *Sustainable:* Land uses should be able to support people and wildlife in the long term.

There are no 'perfect' measures for all of these aspects. Taken together, the

indicators below provide some measure of land use patterns in this region.

## Housing Density

The density of dwelling units within the CRD Regional Urban Containment and Servicing Area is being measured as part of the Monitoring Program for the Regional Growth Strategy. Northwest Environment Watch<sup>1</sup> suggests that densities should be at least 15 units per hectare for a 'transit-oriented' development and up to 40 units per hectare for 'pedestrian-oriented' development. In 2003 (the base year for the monitoring program), the average density within the region's urban containment boundary<sup>m</sup> was only 9.5 units per hectare.<sup>42</sup>

There is a trend towards increasing density as set out in the Regional Growth Strategy. Between 2002 and 2004, the proportion of attached housing types for new buildings increased from 40% to 54%,<sup>43</sup> and the 2002 housing stock was about 35% apartments and townhouses.<sup>44</sup> As well, 90% of all new dwellings built between June 2001 and the end of 2004 were built inside the urban containment boundary.<sup>45</sup>

Pressure on the limited supply of CRD urban land has resulted in an unusually dense community, when compared to many other Western North American

cities. However, densities in this region are still well below eastern Canadian cities such as Montreal and Toronto, and far behind European cities such as Vienna and Zurich.<sup>46</sup>

**Road Length Per Person**

Road length per person also provides information on compactness of communities. When there are more people per unit of road length, there is greater connectivity and less land needs to be used for road construction on a per person basis. Very compact cities such as Singapore or Tokyo have only 1.1 metres of road per person,

whereas sprawling cities like Phoenix, Arizona or Perth, Australia have eight times as much (8.8 metres per person).<sup>47</sup> Greater road length per person can be viewed as an indicator of rural life, but it is more often an indicator of inefficient land use.

Frequently it leads to arterial roads that are congested ‘bottlenecks’ as commuters travel to and from sprawling communities.

In 2003 CRD municipalities had an average of 5.4 metres of road per person, but this varied from a high of 22 metres/person for the Highlands to a more moderate 3.0 metres/person for

Esquimalt and 3.4 metres/person for the City of Victoria (Figure 12).

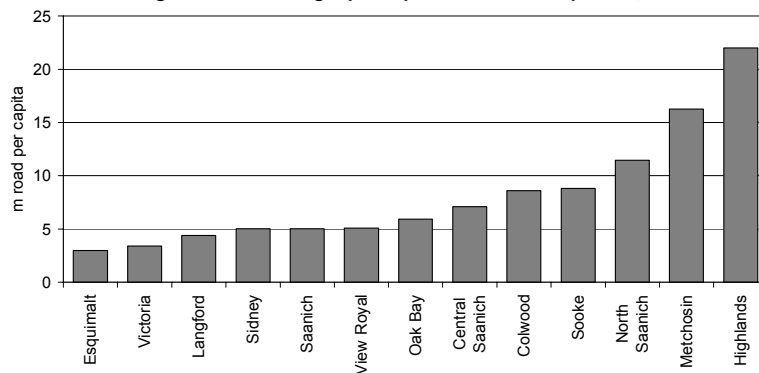
In 2001, road length per person on the southern Gulf Islands area ranged from about 35 metres/person on Salt Spring Island to almost 150 metres/person on Saturna (Figure 13). These numbers reflect the low density settlement pattern that traditionally characterizes the island communities.

FOOTNOTE:

<sup>46</sup>An independent, not-for-profit research centre based in Seattle.

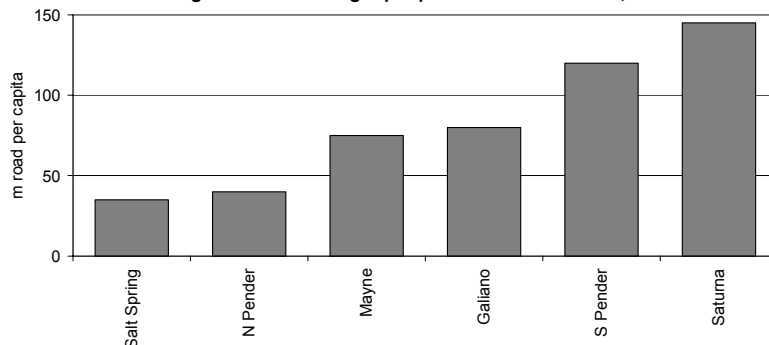
<sup>47</sup>The urban containment boundary is defined in the Regional Growth Strategy.

Figure 12: Road length per capita in CRD municipalities, 2003.



Source: B.C. Municipal Statistics, 2003.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 13: Road length per person in CRD islands, 2001.



Source: Islands Trust, 2003.<sup>49</sup>



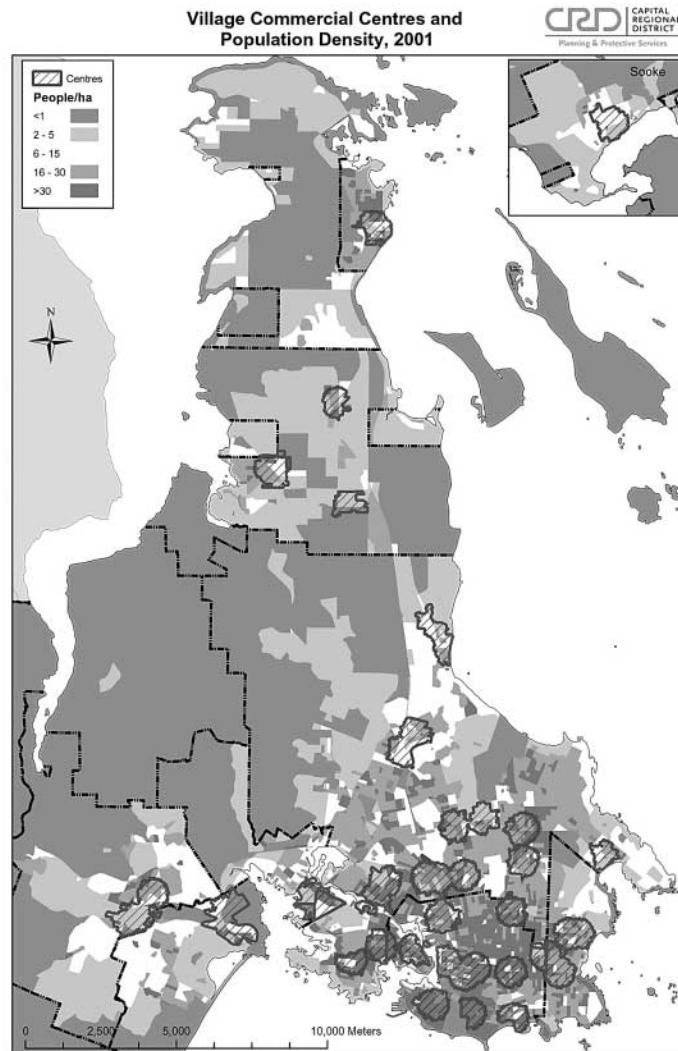
**Walkable Neighbourhood Centres**

When making home location choices many people do not adequately consider the costs of choosing to live in sprawling communities with large lots, or the advantages of living in walkable communities. If people live within easy walking distance of services such as grocery stores, they are less likely to

take the car. This provides environmental benefits (such as fewer greenhouse gases) but also health and social benefits from regular exercise and financial benefits of reduced vehicle operating costs.

The Roundtable worked with CRD Regional Planning Services to identify 'walkable neighbourhood centres'. For

Figure 14: Population within 500m of neighbourhood centres, 2005.

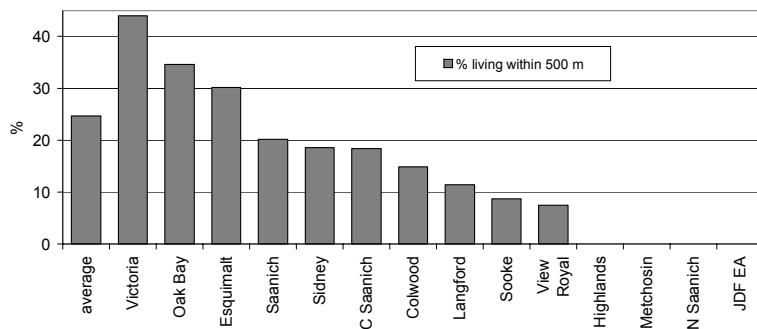


Source: CRD Regional Planning Services, 2005.<sup>50</sup>

the purposes of this indicator, a neighbourhood centre was defined as a cluster of at least eight retail or service businesses around a grocery store (or equivalent group of smaller stores) that are able to provide a typical family with all the food necessary for daily living. The population living within 500 m of this centre (by road) are considered to be within walking distance. The results are shown in Figures 14 and 15.

Victoria and Oak Bay have the largest percentage of their population within walking distance of daily services with 44% and 37 % respectively. Sooke and View Royal have less than 10% within walking distance of neighbourhood centres, and rural areas such as Highlands, Metchosin, North Saanich and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area are close to 0%.

**Figure 15: Percentage of population within 500 m of a neighbourhood centre, by municipality, 2005.**



Source: CRD Regional Planning Services, 2005.<sup>51</sup>



**Proximity to Bus Stops**

Easy access to a bus stop is both a measure of the compactness of a community (typically, the bus system only services areas with sufficient population) and a measure of the connectedness (do residents have the option of taking public transit?). Easy access to bus stops is one way to encourage people to use public transit instead of personal automobiles,

reducing greenhouse gas emissions (see Section 6.1).

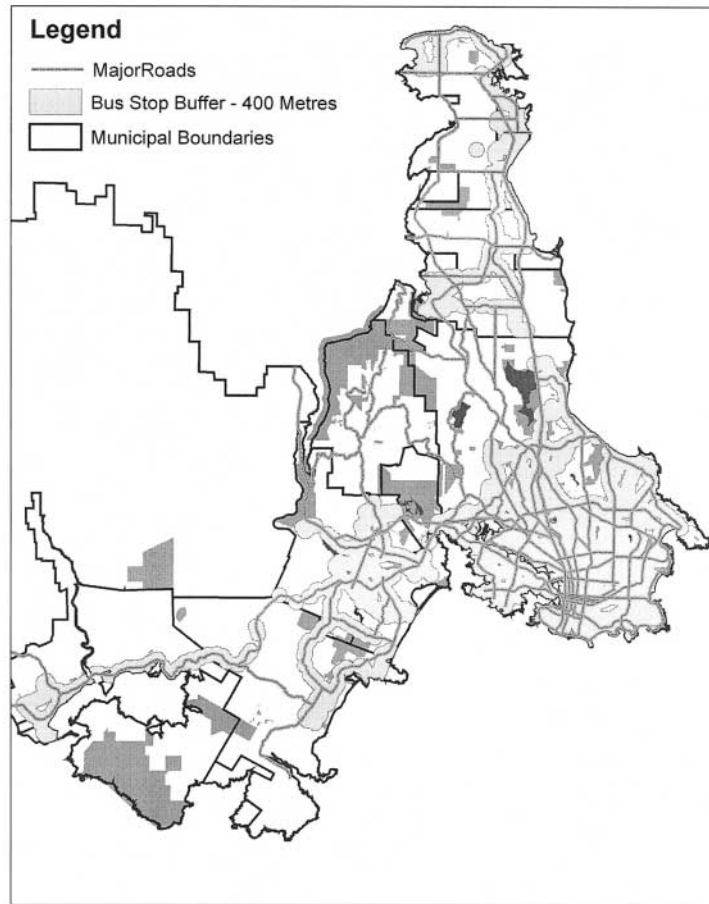
This measure looks at the percentage of the population serviced by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission who live within 400 m of a bus stop. Based on 2001 Census of Population data and 2005 bus stop locations, 82% of the transit region’s population lives within 400 metres of a bus stop (Figure 16 and Figure 17).<sup>52</sup> Note that this

measure simply looks at the distance from a bus stop but does not consider the regularity of bus service at that stop, which will also be a factor in determining the level of bus use.

Compact communities in the core area are generally better served than rural areas such as the Highlands and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Areas.

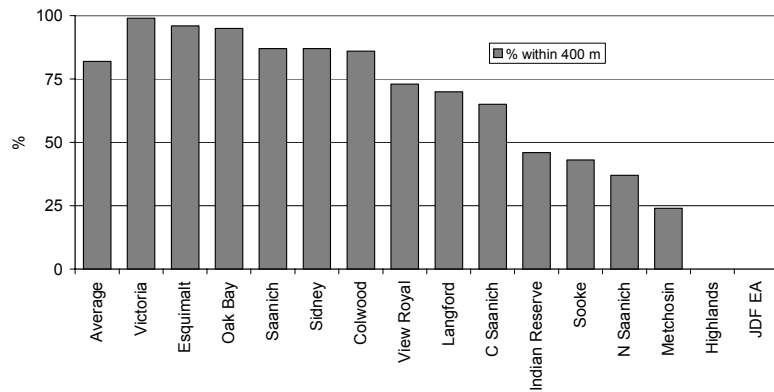


Figure 16: Population living within 400 m of a bus stop, 2005.



Source: B.C. Transit 2005.<sup>53</sup>

Figure 17: Percentage of population living within 400 m of a bus stop, by municipality, 2005.



Source: B.C. Transit 2005.<sup>54</sup>

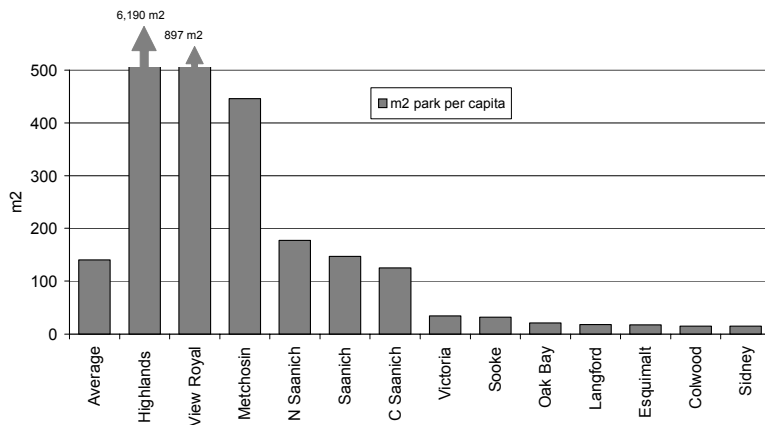
**Area of Park Land**

This measure looks at the amount of park land compared to the size of the population. Included in this statistic are federal, provincial, regional and municipal parks. These provide a range of recreational opportunities from wilderness hiking to neighbourhood children’s playgrounds and ball fields. Information on ‘natural’ parks and their value for conservation and wildlife habitat is reported in Section 4.

The Capital Region is often referred to as a ‘City of Gardens’ and we are fortunate to have numerous parks. In 2003, park land per person varied from the exceptionally high 6,200 m<sup>2</sup>/person in the Highlands, to 15 m<sup>2</sup>/person in Colwood and Sidney (Figure 18). View Royal also has a high level of park land, in part because of Thetis Lake Regional Park. The CRD average of 140 m<sup>2</sup>/person compares favourably with other communities. For example, a widely used standard<sup>55</sup> proposes 103 m<sup>2</sup>/person.



**Figure 18: Park land per capita, 2003.**



Source: B.C. Municipal Statistics, 2003.<sup>56</sup>  
 This data identifies lands that are tax exempt because they are ‘park’ land.



“Any disruption of transport routes, an unexpected stoppage of transit services, a natural disaster or a temporary closure of the border with the United States would quickly lead to food shortages for the residents of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.”

Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Round Table, 2004.

[http://www.communitycouncil.ca/CR-FAIR\\_FS%20Assessment\\_web.pdf](http://www.communitycouncil.ca/CR-FAIR_FS%20Assessment_web.pdf)

### Land Removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve

The maintenance of agricultural land in the community provides insurance against disruption of food supply and provides fresh foods that do not have to be transported over long distances (thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions). Farm land also provides wildlife habitat for some species and contributes to the views and rural feel of some parts of this region.

The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) was established in the mid 1970s, as a land use zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are controlled. Land may be excluded (taken out of) the ALR with permission of the Agricultural Land Commission and used for other purposes such as housing.

In 2003, about 17,500 ha of the Capital Regional District (including the Gulf Islands) were protected in the ALR, about 7% of the total land area.<sup>57</sup> This compares favourably to other North American cities. However, there is cause for concern. After over thirty years of agricultural land protection, a period of time over which many adjustments have been made to fine

tune anomalies, this region is still experiencing an erosion of agricultural lands. Between 1973 and 2003 lands were removed from the ALR at an average rate of 65 ha per year.<sup>58</sup> Between April 2001 and March 2005, nearly 600 ha was approved for exclusion from the ALR, while less than 24 ha were approved for inclusion (Table 10).

Loss of agricultural land increases the challenge of food security<sup>n</sup> for this region, which is heavily dependent on food imported from off-island. Fifty years ago, farmers on Vancouver Island produced an estimated 85% of the Island’s food supply. Now, Island producers provide only about 10% of the food consumed.<sup>59</sup> This means most of our food travels long distances and uses large amounts of energy to reach local tables. It also leaves the region vulnerable if supplies are disrupted for any reason or if energy prices increase in real terms.

#### FOOTNOTE:

<sup>n</sup> Food Security: Access to quality food that is grown, processed and distributed regionally in a sustainable manner. For more information see [http://www.communitycouncil.ca/CR-FAIR\\_FS%20Assessment\\_web.pdf](http://www.communitycouncil.ca/CR-FAIR_FS%20Assessment_web.pdf).

Table 10: Changes to the Agricultural Land Reserve in the Capital Region, 2001–2005

		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	Total
<b>Exclusions</b>	Area Approved (ha)	7.5	212.2	355.8	21.1	596.6 ha
	Area Refused (ha)	0	0	1.8	4	5.8 ha
<b>Inclusions</b>	Area Approved (ha)	11	2	10.6	0.1	23.7 ha
	Area Refused (ha)	0	21.8	0	2.4	24.2 ha
<b>Subdivision</b>	# Applications Approved	3	6	9	4	22
	# Applications Refused	1	1	1	1	4
	# Lots Approved	5	12	16	7	40
<b>Non-Farm Use</b>	# Applications Approved	4	5	7	2	18
	# Applications Refused	0	1	0	1	2
	Area of Non-Farm Use Approved (ha)	38.6	9.9	5.2	0.3	54 ha

Source: Agricultural Land Commission, 2005.<sup>60</sup>

## OPTIONS FOR ACTION

### Individuals can:

- Enjoy the many trails and parks in our region—and then tell people why it is so important to keep these opportunities throughout our region.
- Purchase locally grown foods. The more we can do to help local farmers maintain viable farm operations, the more likely it is that we will continue to have local food choices for the future.
- When purchasing or renting a home, choose one that is within walking or biking, or transit distance to services and your work place. Can your children walk to school? Are you near a bus stop that can take you to work or recreation?

- Find out more about ‘smart growth’ and how it benefits us all financially, socially and environmentally. For more information see the Smart Growth Web site, [www.smartgrowth.bc.ca](http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca).

### Businesses and industry can:

- Select locations and arrange premises so as to appeal to walking and bicycling customers and employees.

### Regional and municipal governments can:

- Promote mixed use land and building development, so employees and customers can live and work in close proximity.
- Discourage the removal of lands from the ALR.

- Encourage the development and use of community gardens.
- Implement the directions of the Regional Growth Strategy and Regional TravelChoices Strategy.