

### Locate State Office Buildings Downtown



## MAKING DOWNTOWN THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT

Downtown location laws require that new or relocated government office space be situated in downtown cores or near transit centers. Some policies also give priority to locating government space in historic buildings. This strategy has a number of benefits.

- By locating government facilities near public transit or downtowns that are transit hubs, state employees and constituents have alternatives to driving. This decreases vehicle miles traveled and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup>
- Locations that are easily accessible by transit are more accessible to constituents, especially lower income families. Transit also improves American Disability Act access.<sup>2</sup>
- Increasing employment density can sustain and create ancillary businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores, further stimulating local economies.<sup>3</sup>
- Locating government buildings centrally reduces sprawl, preserving wilderness and farmland. Newly situated government buildings can form an integral part of new transit-oriented development.
- Increased transit access can lower parking costs, both economic and environmental.

### 5 Easy Pieces on Transportation

1. Pay-As-You-Drive Insurance
2. Fix it First
3. “Complete Street” Roadways
4. **Locate State Office Buildings Downtown**
5. Metropolitan Planning Organization Reform

### About CSI

The Center for State Innovation (CSI) believes every state can achieve shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government. We offer evidence-based, outcome-measured, fiscally prudent strategies for doing so.

A non-partisan, not-for-profit institution, CSI provides many types of assistance to state executives interested in implementing progressive policies.

To learn about CSI’s Policy Briefings, Strategy Academies, and other services offered at no cost, visit [www.stateinnovation.org](http://www.stateinnovation.org).

### A SMALL PRICE TO PAY

Upfront costs to locate state offices in urban cores or near transit infrastructure will vary depending on location and the condition of regional economies. However, even where upfront costs are higher, long-run net costs may be lower in transit-accessible central locations, given the benefits referenced above.

### POLICY IN MOTION

At least seven state governments and the federal government have some variation of a downtown location law. Examples include:

- California's Executive Order D-46-01 instructs the Department of General Services to consider placing agencies centrally, with proximity to public transit and affordable housing, and pedestrian access to retail and commercial facilities. The order states, "This policy is designed to support sound growth patterns in California's cities and towns, by using existing state-owned assets, reducing costs to the state and its taxpayers in leases and operating expenses, ensuring accessibility to state services and facilities for both customers and employees, reducing traffic congestion, and improving air quality."<sup>4</sup>
- Oregon's law (ORS 276.001 to ORS 276.990) requires locating government buildings downtown or in other mixed use centers. Should the Department of Administrative Services determine that another location is acceptable, it must be placed close to public transit if it exists.<sup>5</sup>
- Vermont's policy, expressed in an executive order (Kunin EO #15), gives precedence to placing government offices in existing and historic buildings where possible, and provides for coordination with local government's policies. Tom Torti, Vermont's former head of the Department of Buildings and General Services, stated "The executive order is 100 percent effective. There is really no need for a state agency to go anywhere except downtown...the policy helps to sustain downtown."<sup>6</sup>
- Pennsylvania enacted a downtown location law (1999 HB 728) in 2000, prioritizing restoration and reuse of existing downtown business stock, and requiring consideration of transit access.<sup>7</sup> "State government is prepared to do our share to preserve open space and vibrant downtowns," Gov. Tom Ridge said at the time. "Locating a state office in an existing central business district encourages additional private investment, leads to renovations of neighboring buildings, and preserves open space elsewhere."<sup>8</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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4. Belden, Russonello & Stewart Research and Communications, "2004 American Community Survey." Washington: National Association of Realtors and Smart Growth America.
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8. Oregon Department of Administrative Services, "Facility Siting Policy Manual," <http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/FAC/docs/1256115.pdf>
9. National Main Street Center - National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Community and Economic Development Toolbox," 2003. Accessed at [http://www.cdtoolbox.net/mainstreet\\_downtown\\_revitalization/000220.html](http://www.cdtoolbox.net/mainstreet_downtown_revitalization/000220.html)
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11. National Governors Association, "Growth Tool Kit: Locate Government Facilities within the Neighborhood," 2001. Accessed at <http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.9123e83a1f6786440ddcbeeb501010a0/?vgnnextoid=422c5aa265b32010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>