“DOWNTOWN VISION”

An Advisory Report
Submitted by the

Infrastructure Subcommittee
(ICom)

of the
Downtown Improvement Group

January 5, 2003

Preface

The preparation of this report was made possible through the efforts and commitment of the business professionals listed below. Dedicated to the revitalization of Downtown Fresno, with the support of the many organizations they represent along with the staff of the City of Fresno.

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Ron Patterson ♦ Redi-Corp of Central California
Paul M. Saito ♦ Saito Associates
Joe Burke ♦ Community Medical Center
John F. Ferdinandi Jr. ♦ Residents for Rail Consolidation
Saundra King ♦ Fresno Pacific Towers, Inc.
Stebbins Dean ♦ Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce
Kathy Omachi ♦ Chinatown Revitalization
Chuck Alexander ♦ Fresno Unified School District

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Special thanks, Grubb & Ellis/Pearson Commercial, Pearson Realty and the Fresno Redevelopment Agency for their financial assistance that helped make this report possible.

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BACKGROUND

The Review, Research and Recommendation Committee (3RC) was formed in July 2001 by Fresno Mayor Alan Autry to serve as an advisory group to the Downtown Implementation Team (DIT). On July 13, 2001 the Mayor held a joint meeting of the DIT and the 3RC where he presented an overview of his vision for a revitalized Downtown Fresno and challenged each member to make an unconditional commitment to the effort. On September 21, 2001 the 3RC completed "Destination Downtown", a report that included prioritized recommendations to improve and enhance Downtown Fresno. Portions of Destination Downtown were adopted and included in Vision 2010 as presented to the City of Fresno by Mayor Autry and the Fresno City Council.

Rising to the Mayor's challenge, having completed their initial task, the members of the 3RC elected to continue working towards a revitalized Downtown Fresno. On September 6, 2002 the remaining members of the 3RC reorganized as the Downtown Improvement Group (DIG). In an effort to be adaptive and inclusive, the DIG added new members from other organizations operating in Downtown Fresno. The DIG formed Five (5) subcommittees charged with research and review of past and existing conditions, current policies, anticipated needs, and future desired results. The subcommittees were further charged with making improvement implementation recommendations and overview. Being sensitive to current and planned projects, it was decided that the DIG would concentrate on those projects outside the focus of city staff. The subcommittees were directed to make monthly reports to the DIG and share their progress and recommendations to improve the Downtown Triangle area.

PURPOSE

The Infrastructure Subcommittee (ICom herein) was charged with review of those needs specific to revitalization of the Downtown area as determined in the 3RC report "Destination Downtown" and "Vision 2010". ICom determined that revitalization is occurring on a "piece meal basis" and long-term infrastructure needs are not being addressed. Destination Downtown recommended a Master Action Plan that addressed traffic, parking, transportation, beautification, linkage and promotion. This report shall address each of the issues and make recommendations for long term planning and implementation.

ICom FINDINGS

After review of public opinion, current development proposals, existing conditions and future needs, ICom determined that the following public perceptions and common perspectives of the Downtown area exists:

1. Public parking is inadequate.
2. Public parking is difficult to locate.
3. Public parking is inconvenient to the facilities being visited.
4. Public transportation is too limited.
5. Streets in the Downtown Triangle are too confusing.
6. A lack of direction for visitors who are not familiar with Downtown.
7. Businesses and government buildings are too hard to find.
8. Downtown is a high crime area.

To alleviate these perceptions, beautify the Downtown area in preparation for organized growth and revitalization, ICom makes the following recommendations:

1. Identification and promotion of distinct Districts in Downtown Fresno.
2. Creation of the Downtown Traffic Circulation Loop.
3. Creation of an Intermodal Transportation Depot.

4. Creation of additional Multi-level Parking Facilities.
5. Creation of new Shuttle/People-mover/Monorail Systems to move people in and around Downtown Fresno.
6. New Signage System to enhance way finding.
7. Pedestrian pathway linkage enhancements.
8. Promotion of the Downtown Loop, Parking and Districts within the Downtown area.

A discussion of each recommendation listed above follows on the ensuing pages.

IDENTIFICATION OF DISTRICTS

Downtown Fresno is currently home to several distinct and diverse areas that should be distinguished to enhance both cultural diversity and unique characteristics. The districts should be branded to reflect their long-term personality or new adopted identity. The districts should be promoted in a manner that allows the public to identify with both the type of business located in the district and the geographical locale within the Downtown area to assist in way finding. The businesses located within the districts should use the districts locale to assist in attracting new customers and directions to parking, transportation and traffic circulation. An example of promotional statements would be; "We're located in the Arts and Cultural District of Downtown Fresno."

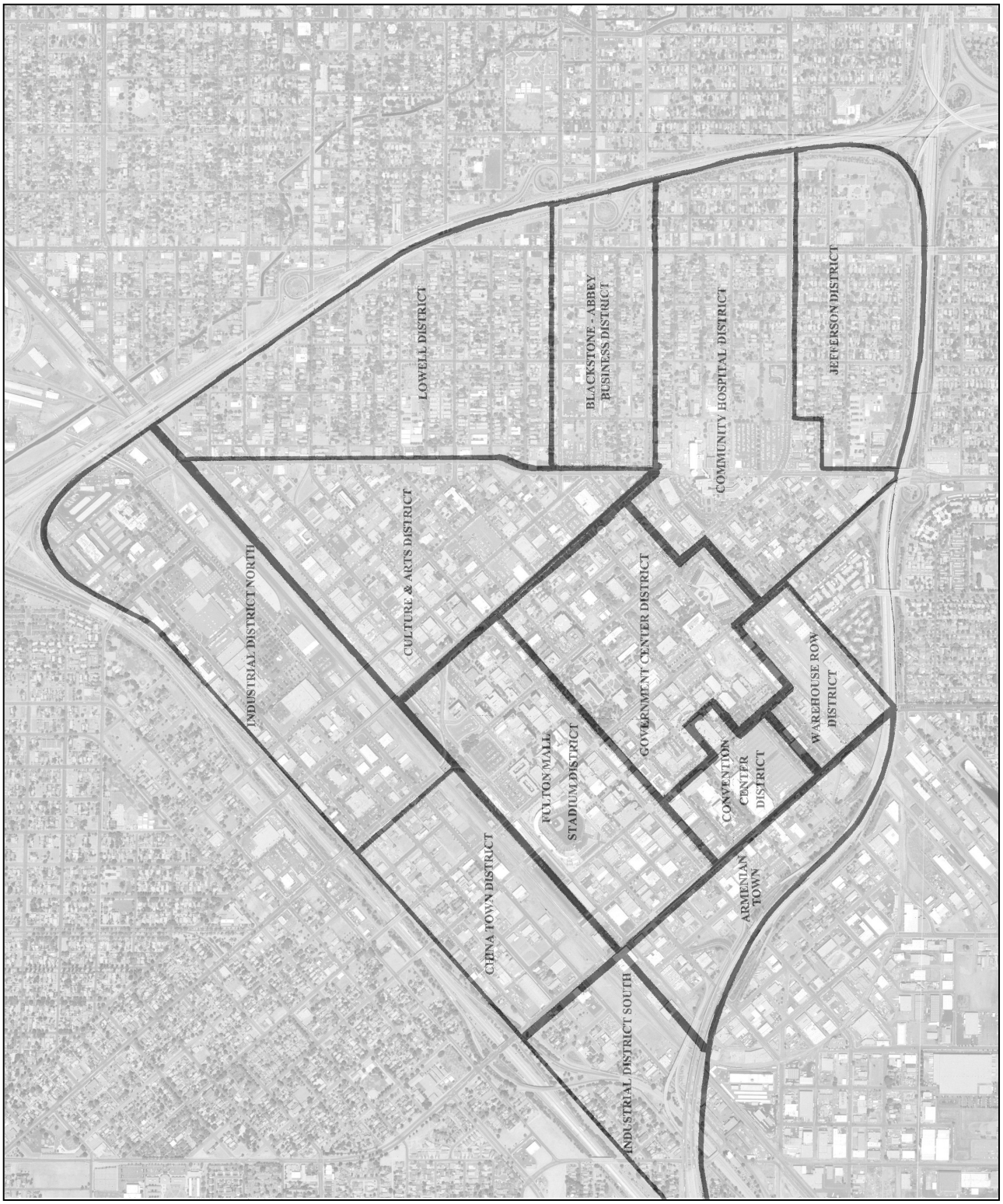
Recommended Districts are as follows:

1. Government Center
2. Arts and Cultural District
3. Medical Center District
4. Fulton Mall and Stadium District
5. Old Armenian Town
6. Historic Chinatown
7. Blackstone-Abby Business Corridor
8. North Industrial District and South Industrial District
9. Warehouse Row District.
10. Convention Center District.
11. Jefferson-Lowell Residential Districts.

See the District Over-lay for specific boundaries of each district and its location within Downtown Fresno. Entrances to each district shall be clearly marked to identify the district and its unique characteristics. Each district should be master

planned to further enhance development within the district to ensure cohesive development that promotes a positive public image. Businesses that enhance image, growth and property values should be encouraged to locate within the district while alternate sites should be explored for those that do not meet the District's image.

PLANNED DISTRICTS



DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC CIRCULATION LOOP

A large deterrent to Downtown development is the lack of a congruent traffic plan that facilitates the movement of traffic through the Downtown area. Primary arteries are in place to move the traffic to the Downtown area but once in the Downtown Triangle area most visitors become lost or unsure as to whether they can find the business they are looking for. ICom recommends implementation of a Downtown Traffic Circulation Loop (the "Loop" herein) by utilizing the existing streets of P, Stanislaus, H and Ventura in a One-Way pattern. Following the one-way direction of P Street north, to Stanislaus west then connecting H Street south to Ventura Avenue east back to P Street. Major arteries will continue to intersect through the Loop as entrances and exits to and from the Downtown area at Tulare Street, Fresno Street, Tuolumne Street, M Street, Van Ness Avenue and Fulton Street. Minor streets will be blocked to enhance traffic flow, increase pedestrian and driver safety and allow for additional development. Parcels that are created by street blockage can be sold to provide needed funding while retaining right of way easements for future transportation needs. All Districts shall be linked to the Loop with adequate signage and parking. Pedestrian linkage to other Districts shall become an integral component of the Loop. Freeways 99, 180 and 41 will connect to the Loop via existing off and on ramps. The concept relies heavily on the benefits of an identifiable traffic pattern at an identifiable geographical location that the public will be able to master with minimal confusion.

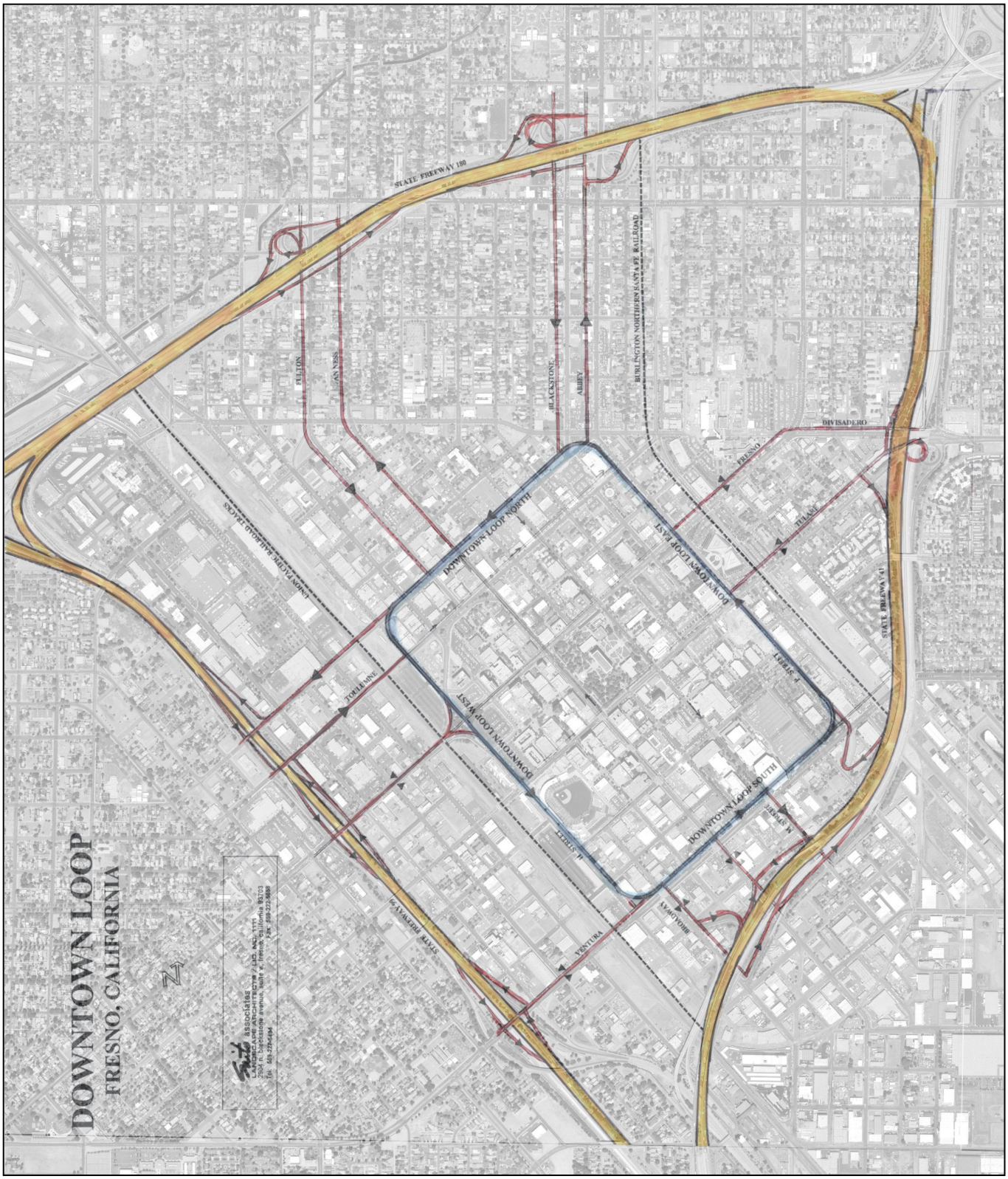
Problematic areas will be analyzed for creative solutions that enhance the public's usage as well as their perceptions of convenience. Areas that require specific attention are the connection between Stanislaus and H Street, the Intermodal Transportation Depot, the Stadium area and the connection between

H Street and Ventura Avenue. The Loop shall have rounded corners and should consist of 3 or more lanes. All entrances and exits will be clearly marked.

To change public perceptions affirmative progress must be made regarding promotion, beautification and signage. Once established, the Loop will become known as an extremely desirable real estate location. Development of large commercial office complexes and retail centers should be encouraged. The Loop will become an icon easily recognizable to the community as well as those developers outside of the area. It could easily become the most desirable business address in Fresno! Accordingly, property values will rise attracting more development and a higher tax base.

See the Downtown Traffic Circulation Loop over-lay for layout and design recommendations. Please note that the drawings are for demonstration purposes and that the details are to be determined at a later date. The over-lay shows Loop and artery connections to the Freeways and through the Downtown Districts.

PLANNED DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC CIRCULATION LOOP

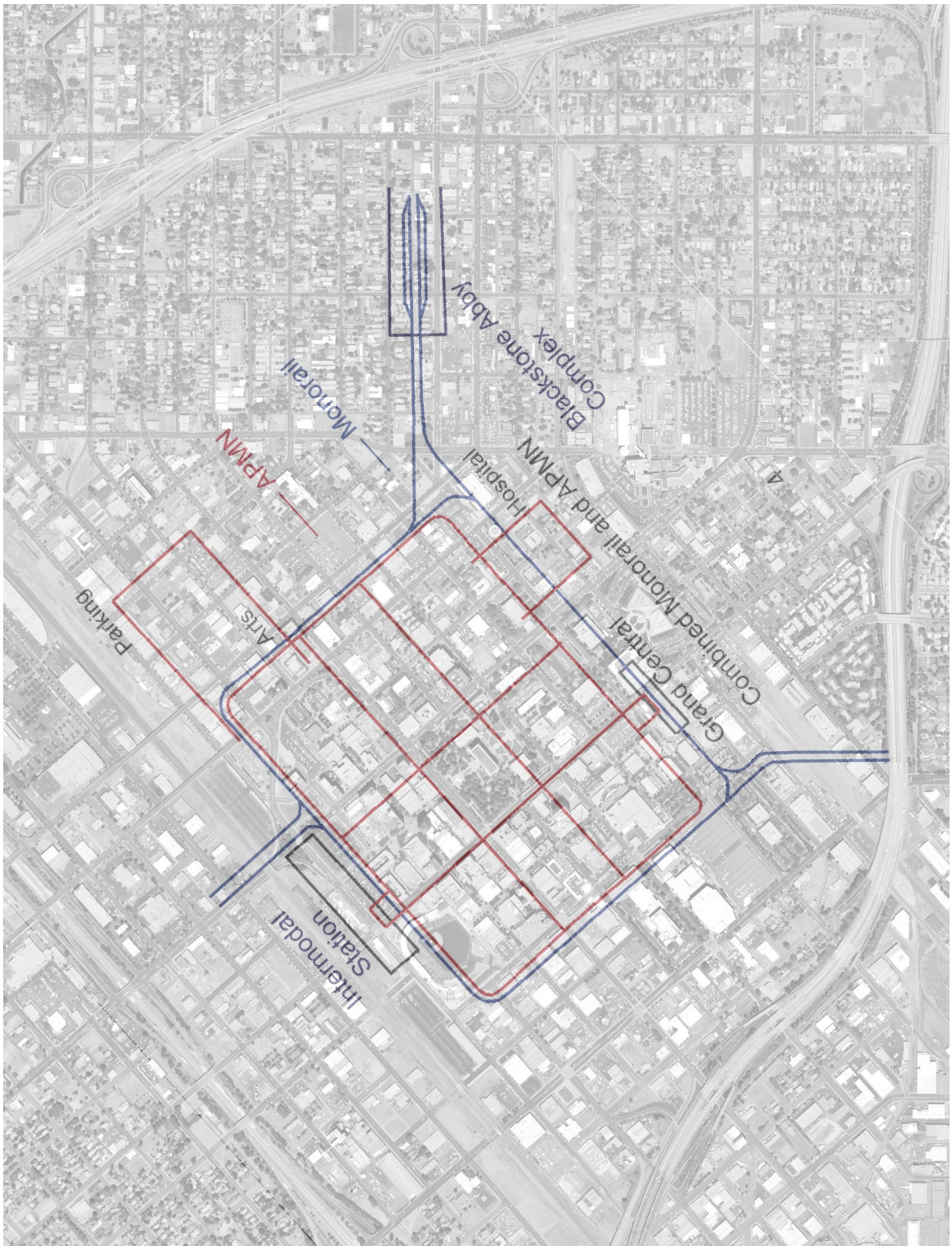


MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION DEPOT

An multi-modal Transportation Depot now being planned for the area bounded by H Street, Fresno Street, G Street and Tulare Street should be established immediately. Facilities that accommodate Greyhound Bus, Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroads, Amtrak, Fresno Area Express, Taxi Companies, Shuttle Busses, Fresno Area Sky Train, High Speed Rail and any other transportation companies that service the Downtown area are essential to the completion of a comprehensive Infrastructure Plan. Terminal locations outside of the Intermodal Depot must be located and right of ways established for them. Development requirements should include right of way easements for future transportation needs. Abandoned streets could be utilized for additional terminal sites at a minimal cost to the community. Adequate multi-level parking must be located adjacent to the Depot and all terminal sites.

See Intermodal Transportation Depot overlay and accompanying drawings for site location, route information and parking. Additional information should be collected from the appropriate authorities concerning transportation company requirements.

INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN



PARKING

Parking has long been a problem in the Downtown area. Dramatic changes in Fresno's parking policy concerning fee structures, enforcement times, availability and location have created a confusing public perception. Parking must be readily available, convenient, inexpensive and easy to find. Multi-level parking facilities should be established adjacent to or near the new Loop and close to major Downtown attractions such as the Fulton Mall, the Intermodal Transportation Depot, the Stadium, and the Convention Center. The parking needs of each District should be assessed and adequate centralized parking required for each public attraction outside of the Central Business District.

Parking lots on H Street are of particular interest due to their proximity to the Fulton Mall, the Stadium and the Intermodal Depot. Existing surface parking lots should be converted to large multi-level parking structures with the cost of building the facilities mitigated through increased property taxes resulting from increased property values in the downtown area. Convenient parking facilities, enhanced pedestrian linkage, landscaping and streetscaping, improved transportation shuttles to and from the parking lots, and clean, safe, well marked streets are infrastructure improvements that have proved to increase property values.

The cost to park in Downtown Fresno should be comparable to other areas in Fresno. The cost of parking for retail customers in shopping centers and office complexes outside of the Central Business District is absorbed by property owners and included with rent and CAM charges which are paid for by the renter monthly. A similar arrangement should be made with merchants within the Central Business District. Parking for special events and transportation depots are unique situations that allow for higher parking fees such as parking at the

Fresno/Yosemite International Air Terminal or at Bulldog Stadium. Parking costs must be shared and comparable to other areas of Fresno to keep Downtown Fresno competitive.

Parking facilities must be linked to buildings they service by attractive pedestrian pathways or reliable shuttles depending on the distance from the parking facility to the building. Appropriate accommodations for weather related issues must also be considered when planning the parking facilities.

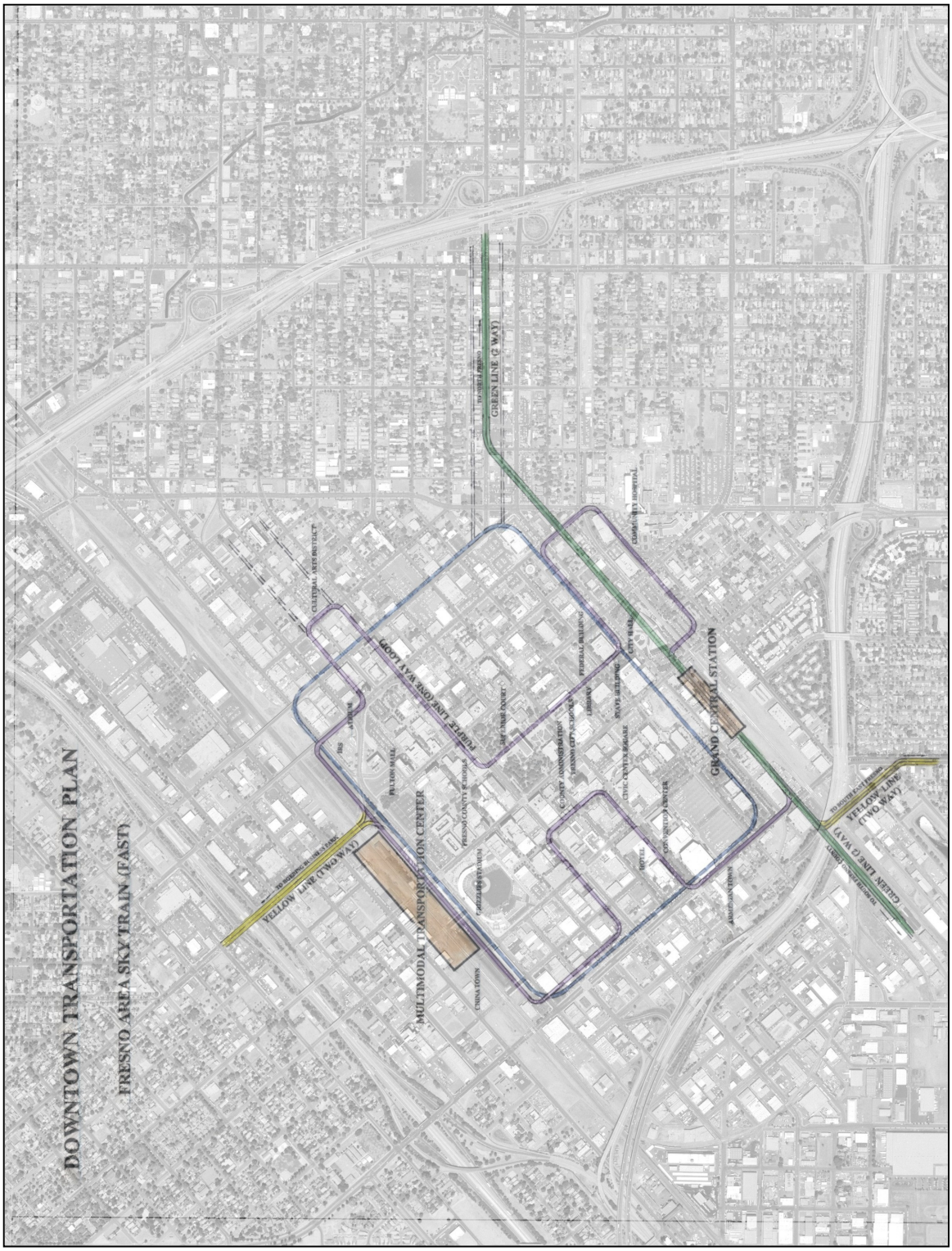
FUTURE AND EXISTING PARKING PLAN

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation that is both reliable and convenient while inexpensive is a necessary component to Downtown revitalization. To minimize the number of large multi-level parking facilities that need to be built, utilization of shuttles to outlying buildings or areas that rely on the facilities, is a must. The Fresno Area Express bus system should be re-routed to enhance transportation around the new Loop, the Intermodal Transportation Depot and all of the new parking facilities. Additionally, a new shuttle system should be established using a public/private partnership.

Depots for a new People Mover/Monorail/Skytrain system could be established on existing street right of ways that are located at or near public parking facilities on the Loop and other areas of Downtown. Multi-level parking structures, the Intermodal Transportation Depot and other multi-storied buildings could be linked with an elevated transportation system. Other cities are currently using busses, trams, trolleys, trains, sky trains, monorails and subway systems. The city must explore all available options and plan for the future. Several organizations are currently preparing plans for future transportation options.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN



SIGNAGE AND WAY-FINDING

To alleviate confusion and to increase driver safety, a new standardized signage system should be created. Signage that directs people to the Loop should be posted on all major arteries entering and exiting the Downtown Triangle area. Once on the Loop, signage should be posted that lists all of the Districts and tells which exit to take from the Loop. The Districts should be listed in the order of the exits with exists clearly marked to avoid distraction or confusion. Signage that directs drivers to parking lots within the Districts should be clearly and distinctively marked.

Signage should be distinctive and simple. It should be prominently posted and easily read. The use of a logo and distinctive color for each District should be explored to mitigate time required to read the sign. An example would be the use of a pagoda in orange for the Chinatown District or a multi-storied building in Green for the Government Center District.

Consistency and simplicity should be the primary components. Please review the artist's renderings for examples of way-finding signage.

IMAGE ENHANCEMENTS AND PROMOTION

The continued beautification and maintenance of Downtown Fresno is essential to revitalization. Well maintained landscaping and streetscaping along with improved pedestrian linkage in the Downtown area will help create a positive image of Downtown Fresno.

Each District should establish streetscape requirements for new construction and look for ways to enhance existing facilities to create a distinctive image for itself. A logo design/theme should be established and an entranceway from the loop and/or freeways should be built to bolster public perception of the District. Entrances should be consistent in design concept but unique in decoration, landscaping and signage as though each District is a village. Upon entering a District, signage should direct a driver to the appropriate parking area for the building that the driver intends to visit. Businesses within the District should be encouraged to use both the Loop and the District name to help their existing and potential new customers find their way. An example for the Metropolitan Museum; Take the Loop to the Arts and Cultural District exit at Van Ness and you will see us on the left just 1 block north. Use our parking lot on the north side of our building. Simple terms and simple directions that are easy to find that leave the client with a positive, easy, “can do” image in their mind.

FUNDING

Of primary concern to any major project is funding. Every community must invest in itself to enhance the lifestyle, safety, transportation, education and welfare of its residents. Infrastructure is one of the primary responsibilities of city government. The utilization of existing streets mitigates a large portion of the cost to create the Downtown Traffic Circulation Loop although costs to create signage, street improvements, right-of-ways and property acquisition, pedestrian sidewalk and pathway improvements are still expensive. Sources of funding should include the profits generated from the sale of remainder parcels of land that are created by closing secondary streets that intersect the Loop, increased property taxes, increased parking revenues, special assessments and grants from the state and federal government. With interest rates at all time lows, borrowing should be considered a strong option.

Another option to be considered is a Private-Public Partnership Improvement District. A complete discussion will be forth coming from the DIG Partnership Subcommittee in upcoming weeks. Private sources or corporate sponsorships may be available for the cost of entranceways and landscaping.

IMPLEMENTATION

As stated in the 3RC report “Destination Downtown”, there are three elements necessary for success. They are as follows: 1) the commitment of the designated leader to recruit the support of the various community groups, including city staff, city council, the mayor’s office and the Redevelopment Agency, 2) completion of a comprehensive Master Action Plan, and 3) the identification of reliable revenue sources.

This report is intended to be the basis of the Master Action Plan to be further developed with the cooperation of all the vested parties involved in Downtown revitalization. ICom has begun the process that must be further embraced by the City of Fresno. Sources of Public-Private funding are being researched and additional sources will be made public as information is collected. Comment and support are now being requested from the public by ICom and DIG as to specific details of this report. Further comments and exhibits will be added to this report as continuing information is collected by ICom.

As stated in “Destination Downtown”, the creation of a full-time “Downtown Czar” staff management position is essential. The individual holding this position would serve in the capacity of a master facilitator, funding expert, action plan coordinator, and would ultimately be accountable for Downtown revitalization. The Downtown Czar should be a dedicated advocate for Downtown development, immune from political posturing and pressure.

CONCLUSIONS

To sustain a long-term revitalization of Downtown Fresno, there must exist the political commitment, professional leadership and endless dedication to the Downtown area. Long-term infrastructure planning that takes into consideration traffic circulation, way finding, transportation and parking is essential to the continued progress of Downtown redevelopment.

This report establishes an executable action plan that is both obtainable and desirable for the future of Downtown Fresno. Establishment of a Downtown Traffic Circulation Loop to help the public successfully move in and around the Downtown Triangle, identification of individual Districts that help identify the geographical areas, new standardized signage that increase visibility, driver safety and way finding, new multi-level parking structures that are easy to find, reasonably priced and strategically located within a District, additional transportation options to move within a District or to different Districts, and the creation of clean, attractive, landscaped pedestrian walkways are all essential elements to long-term growth. Enhancement and continued positive promotion of the Downtown Triangle area must be implemented.

Finally, the DIG and ICom should remain engaged in the research, review and recommendation process, as well as oversight of the performance and accountability of those charged with the responsibility of implementation of the recommendations contained herein.