



MERCED DOWNTOWN STATION AREA PLAN DISCUSSION ON DSAP GOALS

August 19, 2025

Goals are desired future outcomes. In planning documents, goals describe a community's vision in general terms. Goals are not policies. Policies describe intended ways to get to a goal, whereas goals are aspirational statements. Clear goals help point policies and future actions in the right direction.

We request that CAFG members provide feedback regarding the following goals, as described in Merced's current General Plan, 2007 Downtown Strategy, Downtown TBID, and High Speed Rail Authority. CAFG members might suggest better ways of saying something, react to statements that don't ring true, or think of a goal that's missing. After receiving CAFG input, a set of goals will be developed for City Council consideration.

Considering goals early in a planning process helps to understand community priorities. That said, DSAP goals will remain a "working draft" that can be refined as issues become better understood and policies are considered.

General Plan 2030

The City of Merced's General Plan, specifically the Vision 2030 General Plan contains a variety of goals and policies relevant to the downtown area's future development and revitalization. Important dimensions include:

A City and Regional Center: The General Plan aims to maintain and strengthen downtown's role as the regional center for commercial and cultural destinations, employment, education, government, and social services.

Vibrancy and Attractiveness: The General Plan seeks to create a thriving and inviting downtown environment that prioritizes pedestrian activity. Residential and office uses are encouraged on upper floors to bring more people downtown and support local businesses.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections: The General Plan prioritizes strengthening pedestrian and bicycle connections within the downtown and surrounding area to enhance accessibility and promote active transportation.

Jobs and Housing Affordability: Goals include increasing job opportunities and improving housing affordability, particularly within the planning area.

Infrastructure and Facilities: General Plan policies call for adequate infrastructure to support planned growth in the planning area.

Sense of Place: Celebrate the human scale and historic charm of central Merced, its diversity of destinations, and its walkability in the downtown core and Courthouse Neighborhood. , local businesses, entertainment options, and proximity to the rail station.

Economic Development: Central Merced is recognized as a prime location for fostering economic growth, creating jobs, and attracting investment, especially in the context of the future rail station with High-Speed Rail (HSR).

2007 Downtown Strategy

The current General Plan cites six fundamental strategies cited by the 2007 Downtown Strategy document. These strategies have been translated into General Plan policies and actions.

1. Create a superior ambiance.
2. Create exceptional Downtown residential neighborhoods.
3. Build a distinguished Downtown.
4. Solidify Downtown's role as the arts, entertainment and dining destination.
5. Adopt and enforce policies to protect and enhance Downtown.
6. Connecting Downtown to the rest of the community.

Downtown Merced TBID¹

Based on the provided search results and general understanding of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDs), the Downtown Merced TBID likely has goals focused on boosting tourism and economic vitality within the designated downtown area. While the exact goals for Merced's downtown TBID are not explicitly detailed, we can infer them from the general purpose of TBIDs and the broader context of downtown revitalization efforts in Merced:

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https://www.mercedmainstreet.com/#:~:text=The%20MMSA's%20goals%20include:%20**Creating%20a,district%20with%20interesting%20shops%20and%20exciting%20restaurants.

Promote the destination: TBIDs utilize funds for targeted advertising campaigns, public relations, social media, content creation, and sales programs to raise awareness and attract visitors.

Enhance the visitor experience: This can include supporting events, improving infrastructure like streetscaping and signage, and addressing issues related to safety and ambiance.

Increase revenue for businesses: TBID activities aim to increase sales and profitability of its constituents.

Drive economic development: By attracting tourists and increasing spending, TBIDs contribute to job creation and overall economic growth in the area.

High Speed Rail Authority

The High Speed Rail Authority is proposing to relocate the Merced Station from its current at-grade location between G Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way (approved by the Authority in April 2012), to a new location on an elevated structure between O and R Streets in downtown Merced. This new station location, proposed by the City of Merced in 2016, is supported by the Authority and the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA).

With this new location, the Merced Station is envisioned to be an integrated intermodal station serving high-speed rail, San Joaquin Amtrak through the Merced Intermodal Track Connection (MITC) External Link infrastructure project, and Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) External Link. Many aspects of the station's design are still to be determined and will need to be accompanied by environmental analysis.

Here are the key goals the Authority has for its station areas:²

Create Vibrant Station Communities: The Authority refers to its stations as "Station Communities," signifying a vision where the stations serve as focal points for development and activity, fostering community hubs and attracting jobs to the surrounding areas.

Encourage Sustainable and Functional Development: The Authority's plans emphasize sustainability, functionality, and the use of best practices in the design and development of each station and its surrounding area. Station designs prioritize pedestrian access and ensure transit stops are within a short walking distance.

² <https://hsr.ca.gov/high-speed-rail-in-california/station-communities/#:~:text=Vision%20and%20planning:%20both%20playing,Watch%20Conceptual%20Station%20Community>

Integrate with Existing Transportation Networks: Stations are envisioned as multimodal hubs, seamlessly integrating with existing transit, airports, and highways to maximize intermodal transportation opportunities and enhance connectivity within California's overall transportation system.

Drive Economic Development: HSR stations are seen as powerful tools to attract investment, stimulate real estate markets, and generate economic growth, particularly within the station areas and according to ScienceDirect.com possibly increasing land values.

Foster Smart and Sustainable Growth: By anchoring development in city cores and promoting transit-oriented development (TOD), HSR stations aim to reduce sprawl, limit the need for highway expansion, and support more sustainable land use patterns.

Enhance Local Transit Networks: The stations are expected to boost ridership on local transit systems by providing seamless connections to HSR, creating a virtuous cycle of investment in better service and infrastructure.

Reflect Local Character and Identity: The Authority aims to collaborate with local communities and cities to ensure that station designs and development reflect the unique identity, history, and culture of the surrounding neighborhoods.