

CHAPTER 4

VISION DEVELOPMENT: IMAGINING OUTCOMES

This chapter describes challenges and opportunities facing the Neck area, identifies the community values and goals, and establishes a vision statement that serves as guidance for future planning and development.

Vision Development- Imagining Outcomes

GENERAL

Focus group participants, interviews with stakeholders, and members of the community who attended public forums or workshops identified many different challenges and opportunities facing the Neck area. Those issues and opportunities provided a context that guided the development of scenarios and alternative strategies for consideration in the Master Plan process. **Figure 4.1** represents how different context elements interrelate and complement each other to provide a framework in the development of solutions for the challenges and opportunities presented below. The graphic depicts the three pillars of the Partnership for Prosperity vision and Master Plan for the Neck area.

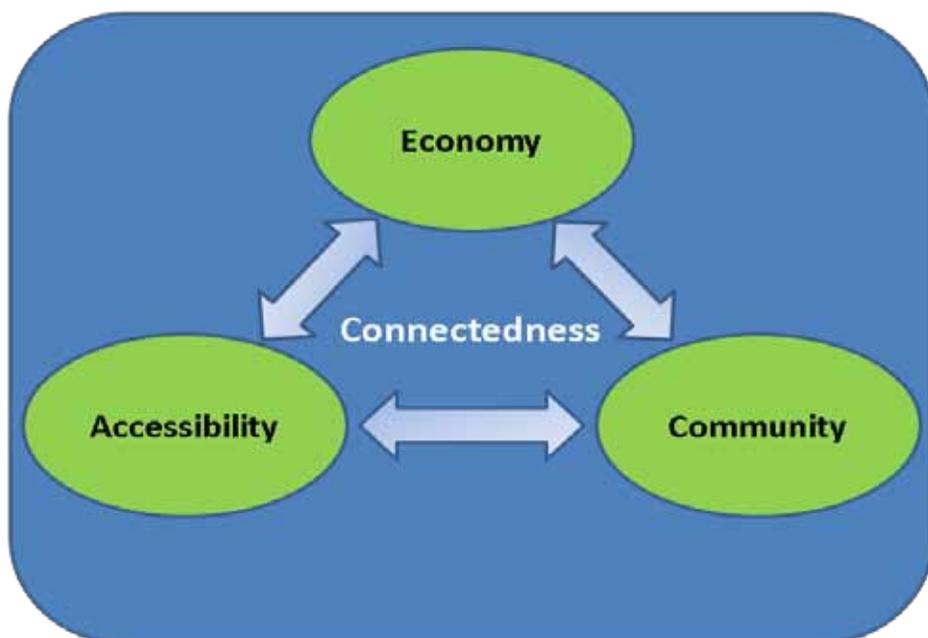


Figure 4.1 Context Relationships for Vision Elements

CHALLENGES

The key challenges or issues facing the Neck area reflect major changes in the recent past in land use, employment, and industry in the area, and the differing interests among various stakeholders in the area. The issue of rail service into and through the Neck area to access the Port of Charleston and other major freight users loomed as a large and controversial issue that placed a great deal of uncertainty on future plans for the location of intermodal facilities and

related commercial vehicle movements. However, it is clear from the number of plans, economic development activities and projects described in a previous section of this report that the Neck area is poised to be the center of the region's employment growth when economic conditions improve. As such, the jurisdictions and agencies with responsibility for various aspects of the study area, including the two cities, Charleston County, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the Ports Authority, SC Public Railways and others, will benefit greatly from a clearly-defined vision for the future, supported by detailed plans and strategies for moving forward to create a desirable future.

The following challenges were identified as consistent themes during focus group meetings, interviews, and consultant team research:

Rail access to the area. Even though there has been resolution regarding the competing plans for rail access to the Port and through the Neck area and old Navy Yard, there is still uncertainty about the future rail network and needs in the study area relative to increasing economic activity of key rail users like the Port, Kinder Morgan and others, passenger rail, redevelopment and revitalization of existing neighborhoods. However, it is generally recognized that freight movement by rail is expected to increase, as will commercial vehicle traffic between intermodal facilities, the Port and the interstate highway system.

Environmental Concerns. Many sites contain soil and groundwater contamination from past industrial activities; the extent of this contamination has not been determined for many sites in the Neck area. Additionally, freight traffic and industry uses create noise, odor, and vibration, which affect the quality of life in existing neighborhoods in the area.

Stalled development plans. There are a number of planned developments in the area that have generally stalled because of the economy or development costs related to soil contamination. These developments include Noisette, Magnolia, and the Promenade, and they may provide an opportunity to reconsider development patterns, if appropriate, that are desirable for the future of the Neck area.

Freight movement and access. Both interstate and local corridors are needed for truck freight movement. Access to I-526 and I-26 is important, but these roads cannot handle all truck traffic. The I-26 corridor south of I-526 and the I-26/526 interchange represents major congestion points in the Neck area, and those congestion levels may force more commercial vehicle traffic onto surface roads, creating conflicts with existing neighborhoods and plans for transit and non-motorized transportation retrofits. The Stromboli corridor is planned for a local access connector as a complement to the planned Port Access Road, which is permitted as part of the Port's expansion plans.

Poor housing stock. There is a lack of quality housing stock at all income levels in the study area. There is a great deal of substandard housing and the City of North Charleston has a program underway to demolish unusable buildings (not just residential) and rebuild as necessary.

Lack of connectivity. Interstate and rail corridors running north/south through the Neck area have broken the network of east/west connectivity for both motorized and non-motorized travel, making access and mobility within the community more difficult. The lack of connectivity places pressure on key east-west roads, such as Montague Avenue, which results in congestion and unsafe conditions for vulnerable road users on foot or bicycle.

Other concerns include gaps and barriers in the bicycle/pedestrian network, lack of access to waterways, and inadequate open space facilities.

OPPORTUNITIES

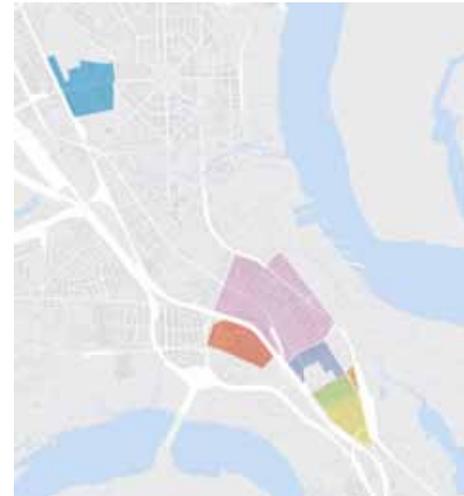
While there are many challenges associated with recovery within the Neck area, there are many existing economic, physical, and natural resources in place that help put the Neck area in a position to take advantage of revitalization opportunities as they present themselves.

The following opportunities were identified as consistent themes during focus group meetings, interviews, and consultant team research:

Organized Transportation and Land Development. Much of the development activity in the Neck area has been haphazard, piecemeal or a legacy of decisions made long ago. Industrial uses and transportation activities have divided and encroached on residential areas; roadways lack consistent accommodation for non-motorized users; and coordinated decision-making between agencies has been difficult to achieve on a consistent basis. This Master Plan presents an opportunity to help define a more organized, integrated and complementary land use and transportation pattern that clarifies expectations and desired outcomes among many different partners in the process.

Unified plan. A unified Master Plan for the Neck Area that incorporates existing plans as appropriate and provides implementation strategies that the two cities and Charleston County can support and promote in their policies, decisions, programs, etc. is important to leverage public and private sector investments, provide direction and balance competing interests.

Neighborhoods. The neighborhood councils in Charleston and North Charleston are strong and active, taking pride in their communities and being involved in the



LAMC neighborhoods

decision-making processes that affect them. Several of the neighborhoods have undertaken a great deal of planning already for their future and are working to implement those plans. The neighborhoods in the study area generally want to be involved and are interested in the master planning process. Context-appropriate infill development can provide needed services and employment opportunities for existing neighborhoods, and create a new district with housing options and services.

Multimodal transportation.

- While CARTA provides fixed route transit serving the peninsula and Tri-County Link provides regional transit service, there has long been discussion of light rail or commuter rail service (or some form of premium transit) for the future. Elected officials from both cities are very interested in commuter rail, and the Coastal Conservation League has proposed a light rail line serving key activity areas. The Partnership for Prosperity Master Plan helps to provide an integrated land use-transportation focus to those ideas in ways that help strengthen the local fixed route transit service and complement the on-going study examining alternatives for passenger rail in the I-26/US 52 corridor.
- In addition to public transportation, much can be done to improve conditions for bicycling and walking in the area, where a large number of people already bicycle or walk for transportation, through on-street and off-road facilities, and program-related initiatives involving education, encouragement of the role of law enforcement and equitable consideration of the needs of people who are transportation disadvantaged.
- The surface roadway network in the Neck area is generally operating under capacity today, due to changes in development and traffic patterns since the closure of the Navy Yard. Some local government staff believe that the current excess capacity is needed to accommodate future growth (both residential and commercial/industrial) in the area, while others have indicated that not all the capacity is needed, even for future infill/redevelopment, and there might be an opportunity to modify some of the corridors to serve as more “complete streets” that better accommodate the needs of all users.
- A site has been identified for a future CARTA/Amtrak/Greyhound intermodal transit center that offers the possibility of supporting commercial and residential development. Given the funding shortfalls to develop the

site, the existing Amtrak location in the Liberty Hill neighborhood also offers a potentially lower cost option for such an intermodal transit center, if designed sensitively to fit in with the neighborhood and adjacent new development.

Land use/mixed use development. As previously mentioned, several developments planned for the area have been abandoned or delayed, and this Master Plan identifies the appropriate future land uses and development patterns for these areas. The City of Charleston is interested in increased residential development in the area, as is the City of North Charleston, though its focus may be more on preserving/strengthening existing neighborhoods and bringing in economic development and jobs. Reynolds Avenue is one of several corridors that provide a potential for mixed use/commercial development through redevelopment and infill development.

Environmental justice. The neighborhoods in the study area care about air quality, noise and visual blight, especially issues that arise from industrial development. These neighborhoods have mobilized successfully in the past to challenge development that they felt would negatively affect the quality of life and hinder opportunities for reinvestment. Other issues related to environmental justice involve keeping communities intact and not allowing them to be divided by transportation facilities, commercial vehicle routing and noise.

Green industry. With a large amount of vacant and under utilized industrial areas, the Neck area is a prime location for future green industry and light industrial uses involving research and development. In fact, the Clemson University wind turbine facility provides an opportunity to bring in a cluster of complementary businesses involving education, research, assembly and manufacturing.



Rendering of Clemson University wind-turbine facility.

Food and services. The Neck area is generally considered a “food desert,” where there are lower income neighborhoods without convenient access to a grocery store. An agricultural center is now open on Morrison Drive to provide an opportunity for residents to purchase fresh produce from local farmers. In addition, a number of sites are being considered as retail centers with grocery stores.

Open spaces. Parks and natural areas are unifying elements that should

be available for all people in the Neck area. With environmental areas, vacant lots, and new green spaces available as part of the redevelopment and development activities, the opportunity exists (in conjunction with the bicycle and pedestrian network) to create a connected network of green transportation modes and open spaces that connect and act as community destinations.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

VALUES

A vision for the future of the Neck area that transcends the status quo and has staying power beyond the short term must be based on core values within the community. The vision statement and master plan to achieve the desired outcomes must be aligned with these defined core values.

Values endure, and are not likely to change over the short term. Thus, they provide a good framework for guiding the community (including government, citizens,

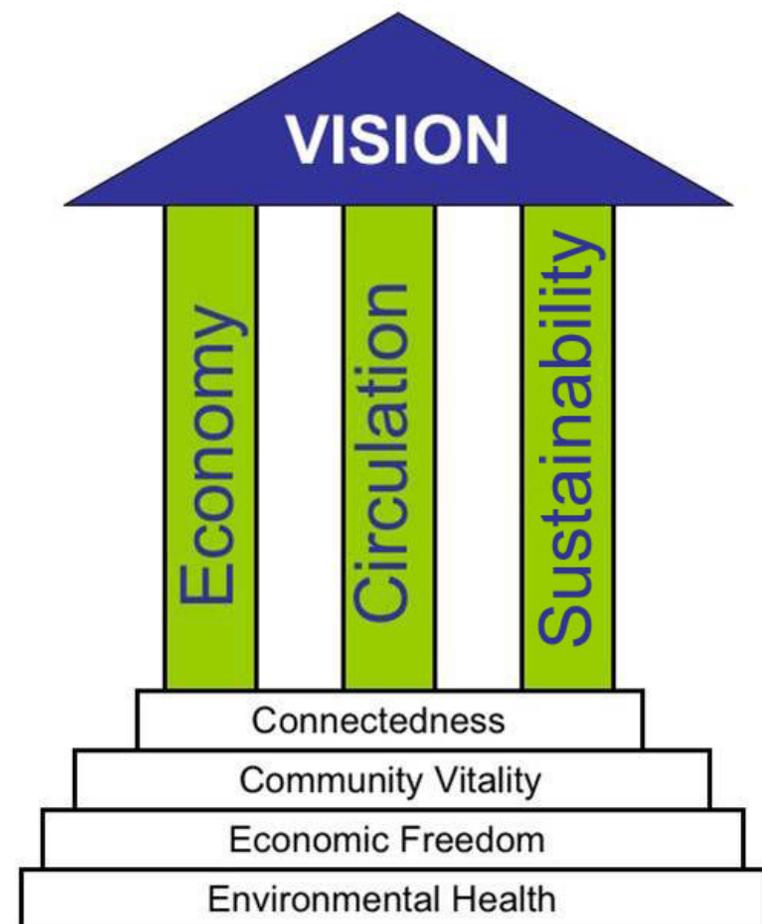


Figure 4.2 Community Values

businesses, and other organizations) as it moves forward to accomplish objectives identified in the Master Plan. The community values identified in **Figure 4.2** are the result of a thorough review of existing planning documents and thoughtful conversations with a series of focus groups, the Steering Committee, BCDCOG, and citizens at various public forums about what makes the Neck area a special place.

Connectedness – The identity of the area and neighborhood as a desirable place, with good transportation access for people of all ages and abilities to reach their destinations, socialize with friends and family, and enjoy a more livable community.

Community Vitality – A strong and resilient community that is welcoming to a diverse and growing population, with the housing, transportation and economic opportunities to sustain the community long into the future.

Economic Freedom – The ability to make a living through access to education and training, transportation choices and affordable housing options, enabling residents and businesses in the Neck area to pursue their aspirations.

Environmental Health – Reducing the pollutants to air, noise and water so that neighborhoods in the Neck area can prosper, while retaining their close-knit character with a renewed sense of civic pride and purpose.

From these core community values, the following principles supporting the values help form the foundation for the Master Plan:

- Healthy, safe, lifelong communities and neighborhoods;
- Community gathering spaces and destinations;
- Diverse economy and job opportunities;
- Multimodal transportation choices;
- Air quality and sustainability;
- Balance neighborhood needs with business and industry;
- Increased educational opportunities; and
- Housing choices and home ownership.

DEFINING THE VISION

The vision establishes a concise statement of the Neck area’s values and goals and provides a guide for future planning and development.

The Partnership for Prosperity vision that emerged from this process is to:

Strategically guide transportation investments and development activities to preserve and strengthen the historic, cultural and social character of the Neck area while encouraging new economic opportunities in targeted areas that benefit the region and local residents, and develop a robust multimodal transportation network that shortens travel time, reduces conflicts and environmental impacts, and improves access and mobility for all users.

The vision is meant to guide future planning and development activities by developing feasible transportation plans and preserving the beauty of the unique environmental features present along the peninsula. It is intended to clarify and confirm the direction of key redevelopment, revitalization, transportation, and economic growth opportunities that will enhance and sustain the quality of life for all Neck area residents and strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region as a whole. The elements of the vision will continue to evolve, but its overall direction and key recommendations spring from the values defined by the community.

DEFINING A WORKING VISION

Figure 4.3 shows a graphic composite of the input received during the map exercise at the first public workshop (summarized in Chapter 3 of this report). It represents important places, connections, and barriers/problems identified by the community. The map served as an information baseline as the team began to look at how different program elements within the Neck area were inter-related and it served as a basis for the Vision Elements Synthesis map that was developed later in the project.

The Vision Elements Synthesis map in **Figure 4.4** was developed as a working document that identified issues and opportunities, illustrated project concepts and relationships, and graphically depicted actions and strategies that helped move from the current reality to a preferred future vision. It was part of the foundation that guided the planning process. It was derived from data gathered from existing planning documents and through focus group discussion, stakeholder interviews, surveys, web site questionnaires, and community workshop exercises with public participation from hundreds of residents.

The Vision Map is a fluid document that provides guidance for achieving both short- and long-term community goals. It defines the future development direction of the area’s existing and emerging centers, corridors and gateways, each with a distinct identity and development form, yet well-connected to the existing community fabric and focal points. However, it is a framework resource only and leaves specific project development to the appropriate jurisdictions, private enterprise, market conditions, and economic forces.

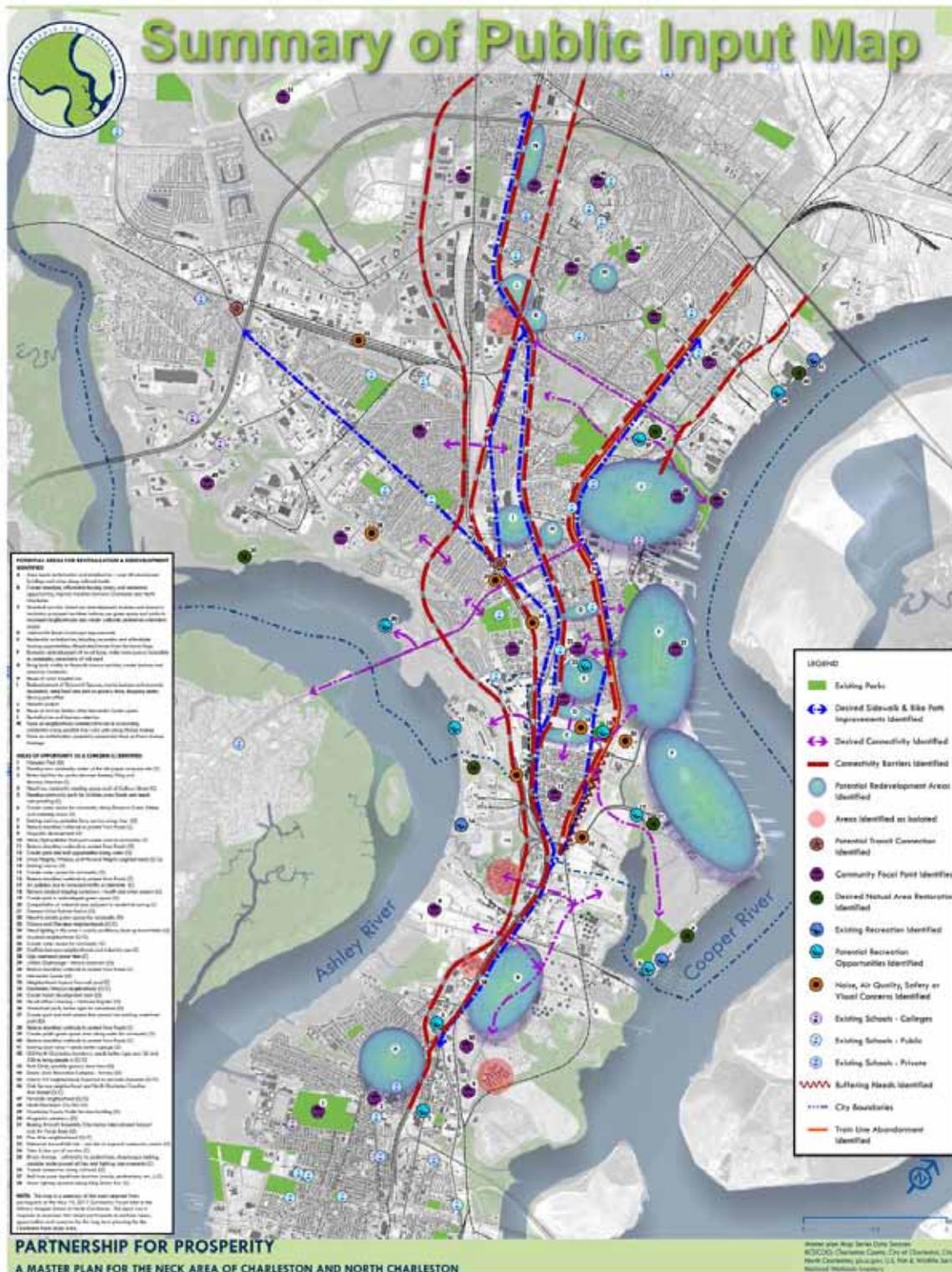


Figure 4.3 Summary of Public Input Map (See Appendix A pg. 201)

Figure 4.5 presents the working vision concept that emerged from the analysis of prior plans and extensive stakeholder and neighborhood discussions. Early in the study process, the consulting team developed the working vision shown in the figure as a simple, concise map to feature the concept of a series of target or catalyst areas connected to a transportation spine network along the I-26/US 52 corridor that have the power to transform the Neck area.

The spine network serves as the unifying corridor that connects the Neck area both regionally and locally to jobs and industry, to neighbors, to services and to amenities for public health and a high quality of life. The vision establishes the spine network as a complete corridor for all users, consisting of highway, rail, transit and bicycle/pedestrian networks that operate within the corridor. This “Spine and Ribs” transportation network depends on linkages with development along the Cooper and Ashley Rivers, West Ashley and the neighborhoods within.

Each of the catalyst nodes shown on the map are envisioned to become centers of place and prosperity, each at different scales and designed to function as multimodal transportation hubs and development activities to support regional and local transportation networks, such as commuter rail, light rail, and interconnecting buses, all with a high level of bicycle and pedestrian accessibility. In some cases, the catalyst nodes focus more on supporting existing neighborhoods; in others they are opportunities for compatible growth at a regional scale, such as in the case of the North Charleston City Hall area. A network of green corridors, providing continuity of parks and open space, complements the transportation networks and provides a buffer between more intense development and residential areas.

The working vision map served as a useful organizing framework for further development of the Master Plan concepts and projects, as defined in subsequent chapters of this report.

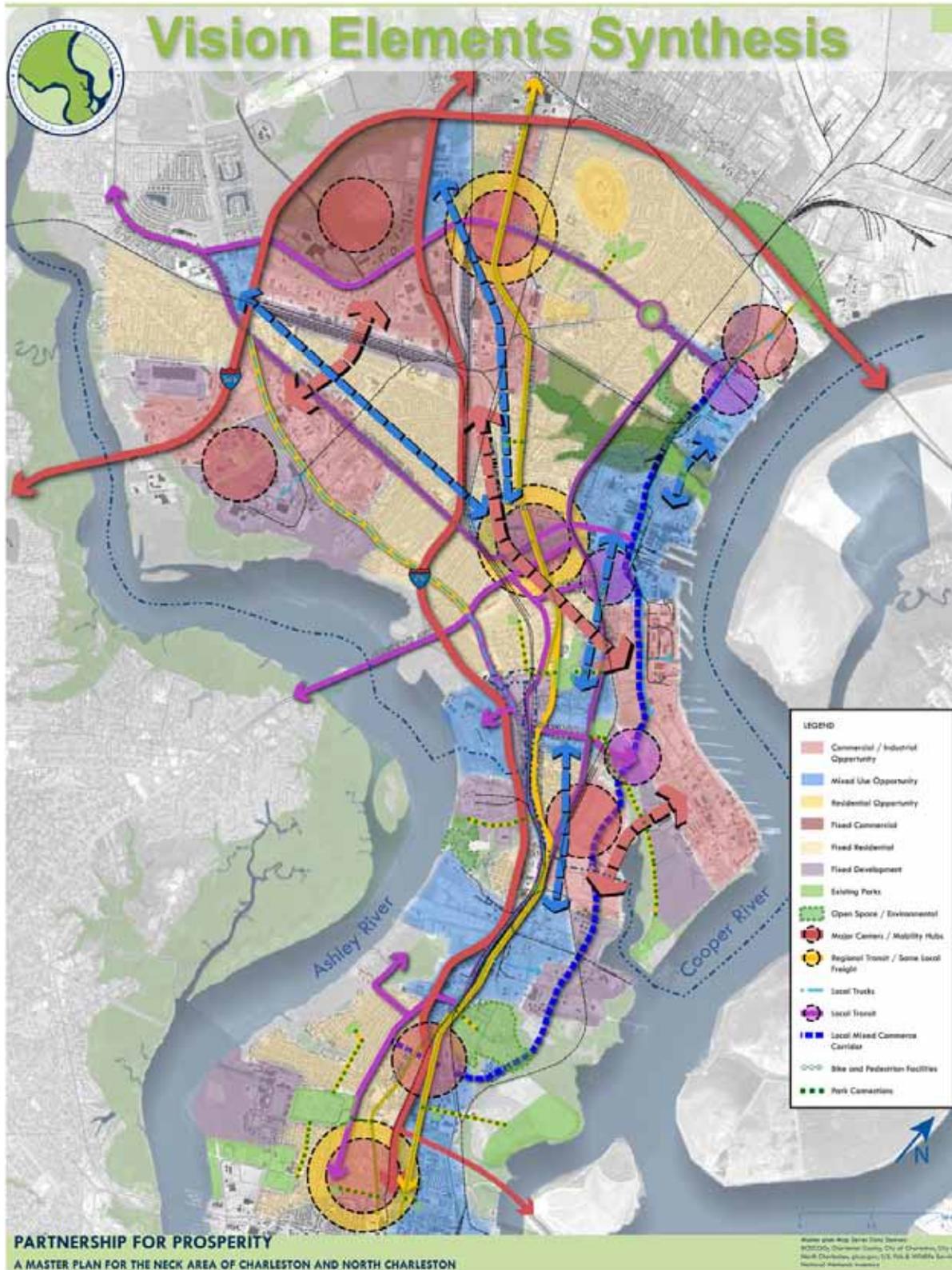


Figure 4.4 Vision Synthesis Map (See Appendix A pg. 202)

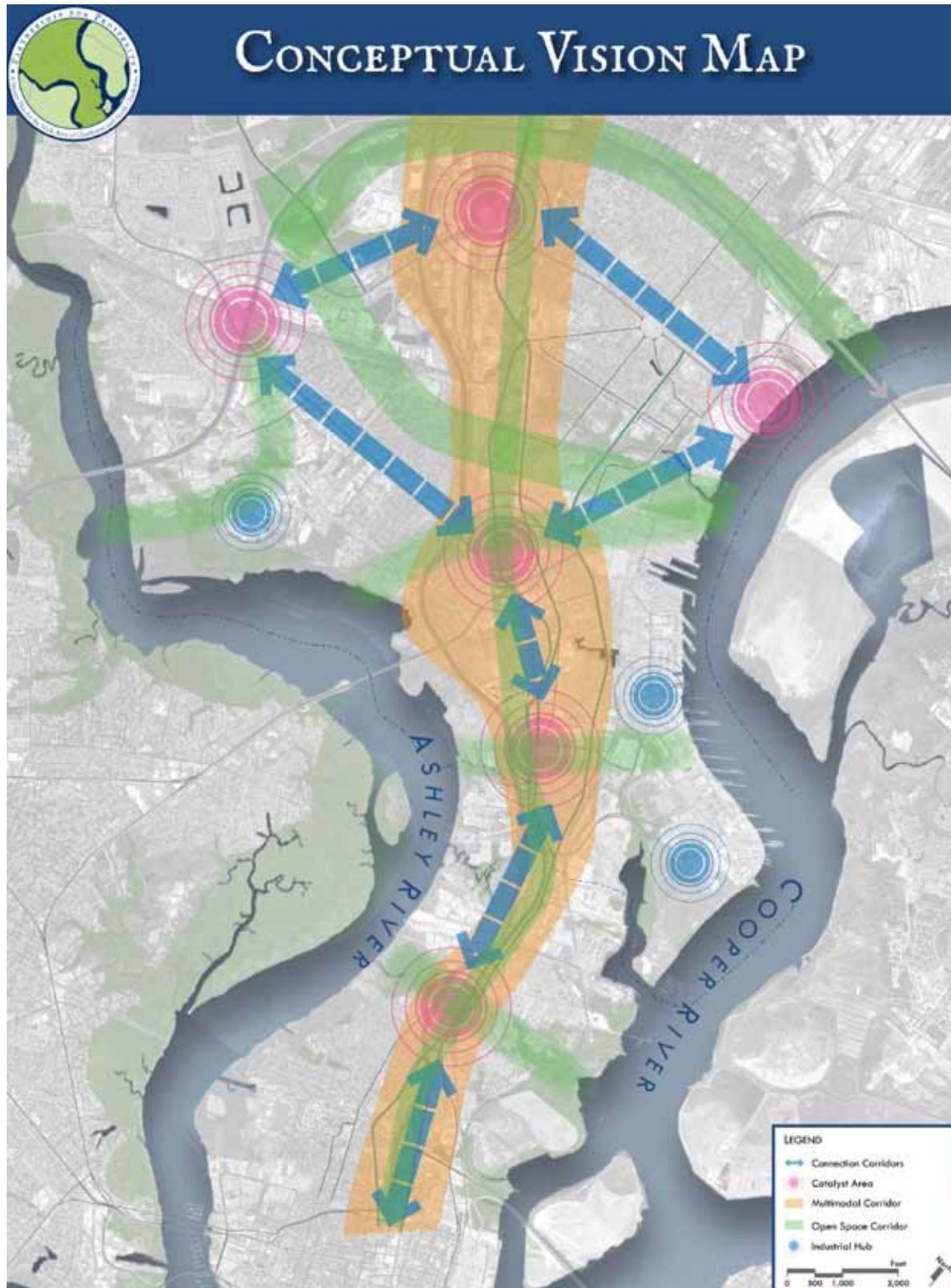


Figure 4.5 Conceptual Vision Map (See Appendix A pg. 203)

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