

SOUTH SOUND VISION 2029

BY TODD MATTHEWS



RENDERING COURTESY OF GRANT ARCHITECTS-LEMAY MUSEUM.

Which major development projects will shape Tacoma and Pierce County over the next 20 years?

Tacoma earned the nickname “City of Destiny” more than a century ago. But whatever destiny was in store, it has always been intangible. In Tacoma's early history, Northern Pacific Railroad's decision to make the City its western terminus for transcontinental service all but guaranteed it would be the largest city in Washington state. However, changing industries shifted that title to Seattle.

Today, a handful of projects are far enough along in the development pipeline that they could be destiny-changers. What will the South Sound region look like in ten or 20 years? Which current development projects will have the biggest economic impact and change the face of not only Tacoma, but also Pierce County? If I could predict the future, I would be in another line of work. But here are a few of my “best guesses” as to which projects will affect how Tacoma and Pierce County look by 2029.

No other project will have more impact on the South Sound region than the nine-acre, \$100 million LeMay Car Museum in Tacoma's Dome District. You could point to the impact tourism will have on the local economy, as museum officials estimate 500,000 people will visit the museum and pump \$34 million into local coffers. You could also point to the interactive features visitors will enjoy. Slip behind the wheel of a stock car in the museum's Speed Gallery for the virtual experience of racing laps at well over 200 miles per hour. Step into the History and Culture gallery, where a 360-degree theater-in-the-round will project images of speeding cars in motion. There will also be an interactive exhibit where visitors can design their own automobiles. The most visible impact will be the museum's physical presence on Tacoma's skyline. As visitors traveling on

Interstate 5 approach the Tacoma Dome, they won't be able to ignore the main pavilion's glass shell rising from the edge of the lush green expanse of an outdoor show field. It's a stark contrast to the Dome District's gritty and industrial feel today.

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Even the design plans unveiled earlier this year are dreamy and futuristic: Inside the museum, flesh-colored wooden beams raised four-stories high curve and stretch like whale ribs across a collection of vintage automobiles; and the grand entry hall includes a floor-to-ceiling glass facade that presents downtown Tacoma's skyline and the Murray Morgan Bridge in a neat, postcard-perfect panorama.

You won't have to wait until 2029 to enjoy the museum. After many years of planning and fund-raising, museum officials announced recently construction would begin this fall on the first phase of the project: A \$58 million, 165,000 square-foot project that will include parking, car collector center, vehicle storage, administration offices, research library and classrooms, banquet facilities, and restoration education center. Later phases will include 90,000 to 250,000 square-feet of multi-level retail that could include cinemas, cafes, restaurants, and shopping; and a 250,000 square-foot main pavilion with six galleries, main lobby, and banquet facilities for up to 800 people.

It is clear this is one project that will drive the City's future.

Hope floats on Dock Street these days as one development company says it is close to purchasing land for -- and breaking

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ground on -- a Marriott Residence Inn on downtown Tacoma's waterfront. According to a presentation to Tacoma City Councilmembers earlier this year, the three-part, \$40 million project calls for the 96-room Marriott, a 128-room Hilton hotel by 2015, and an office building (also by 2015). When the entire project is completed, it will boast 5,700-square-feet of waterfront retail space.

If the Bellingham-based developer, Hollander Investments, can pull this off despite hurdles it would be a nice jolt to a stretch of downtown that already has the Museum of Glass, a waterfront esplanade and park, and a small core of residents. Throw in tourists, office workers, and retailers, and this stretch of downtown is poised to become one of Tacoma's finest new urban neighborhoods.

Finally, a futuristic look at Tacoma and Pierce County wouldn't be complete without including one major wish-list item that won't be completed by 2029, but is still overdue and needed.

Link light rail service between the airport and Tacoma would send more tourists to Tacoma's museums, restaurants, and other downtown amenities. Last year, voters approved a ballot measure that called for an extension from Sea-Tac Airport to Federal Way, and preliminary review and property acquisition to clear the way for a line from Federal Way to Tacoma. It's a long way off, but it would be nice one day to step off an airplane and onto a speedy light rail train headed south, instead of just north. ←



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