



2.0 Existing Conditions

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This Chapter provides an overview of the conditions that exist in the Specific Plan Area at the time of the Plan's drafting. It documents and describes the physical and structural conditions of the Boulevard, particularly as they relate to the City as a whole. It concludes with a summary of how the Boulevard has transformed over time to reach its current role under the conditions that exist today.

2.1 History

The City of Whittier lies within the East Los Angeles basin, at the base of the Puente Hills. Whittier is located 12 miles southeast of Los Angeles, at the border of Orange County, and its close proximity to several highways, with Interstate 605 and Interstate 5 at its western boundary and Interstate 60 to the north, make it easily accessible for the Orange County and Los Angeles County communities, as shown in Illustration 2: Existing Conditions-Regional Context.

Founded in 1887 as a Quaker settlement by the Puente Hills, Whittier was named after a Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, who then dedicated a poem to the town. Whittier's early economy was dependent on agriculture, and the construction of a spur connecting Whittier to the Southern Pacific Railroad facilitated the transport of local products. Whittier's growth continued with the expansion of railroad service to the town, and by the 1920's, Whittier was a major contributor to the citrus and agricultural belt of California, shipping large quantities of fruits and nuts annually. The development of the Santa Ana oil fields further expanded the town's economy.

Whittier's downtown development began at the crossroads of Greenleaf and Hadley Streets, and the Uptown Whittier Village of today is the result of preservation and rejuvenation of that original commercial district. The Quakers founded Whittier College, now a private liberal arts college and the town's first school of higher learning. The town's growth, particularly as a residential community, continued with the annexation of part of East Whittier in 1960. In 1987, Whittier was struck by an earthquake that damaged the Uptown District in particular and caused over \$10 million dollars worth of damage throughout the City.

2.2 Community

The City's estimated population is 85,000, spread across a land area of 14.8 square miles. The demographics of this population are changing: while families have always made up a large proportion of the City's population, these families are becoming younger, and there are more children in the community than ever before. And while the elderly population is growing nationally and statewide, the number of people age 65 and up in Whittier has dropped over the last ten years. Reasonably priced housing for the elderly is difficult to find, and many seniors are leaving town, pushed out by higher housing costs. The continuing influx of people from East Los Angeles, especially younger families, adds to the City's need for more affordable housing. Most importantly, Whittier has seen dramatic growth in its Hispanic population, which now comprises about 56 percent of the total population of the City.

These demographic changes have an effect on the services provided by the City. Consideration of the City's elderly population should be taken into account. Future developments must be planned to absorb the young and growing population, in terms of both employment and housing, and residential types should reflect the preferences of the population. Schools must provide more teachers and administrators who are bilingual. These factors also have a strong implication on retail in the City, if it is to capitalize on local opportunities and reflect the preferences of the local Latino and youth market segments.



The home of Whittier's first settlers, Jonathan and Rebecca Bailey (1914)



The Oil Building and Mission Court is one of the oldest remaining commercial buildings in Whittier (1914)

2.3 Whittier Boulevard

a. *The Boulevard's Past*

The Boulevard has been in existence in some form for the length of the City's existence. It began as a link in "the King's Highway", the trail that connected the Spanish Missions of the West, today called El Camino Real. Some of the City's more majestic homes were located on Whittier Boulevard, although none exist today. The roadway slowly grew to support some of the region's commercial and recreation destinations, and residents of nearby towns remember Whittier Boulevard as the "way to go for a day or night on the town" during the late 1920's and '30's. Restaurants, movie theaters, and other attractions drew residents from adjacent neighborhoods to the Boulevard.



R.W. George residence built in 1905

Whittier Boulevard saw an explosion of growth in the late 1940's, when the end of the war brought the return of veterans and an influx of growing families to the City of Whittier. Post-war prosperity expanded Whittier's desirability as a place to live, and homes were in demand- many of the area's citrus groves were sold during this time as land for subdivisions. Jobs were plentiful and salaries began to increase in the region, and new businesses began to dot along Whittier Boulevard. Very few new stores opened up in the City's commercial core at this time, and existing businesses began to desert their Uptown locations. The proliferation of malls in the area changed the way people shopped, and the Boulevard thrived with the opening of two shopping centers, the original Whittier Quad in 1953, and the Whittwood Mall two years later.



Whittier Boulevard in 1905

In 1955 the City made plans to turn Whittier Boulevard into a divided highway, widening it from Philadelphia Street to Washington Boulevard and in the process planned to cut down a historic walnut tree (dating from 1907) at the Five Points Intersection. The plan proceeded, but community efforts to save the tree were successful, and a roadside park was built around the tree, now listed on the California Register of Historic Landmarks.

b. The Boulevard Today

Today Whittier Boulevard continues to be a location for commercial and industrial development throughout Los Angeles County, continuing west through the cities of Pico Rivera and Montebello and eventually transforming into the Wilshire Boulevard Corridor through downtown Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. For the City of Whittier, it plays a role as the major access route to the 605 Freeway and as the primary distributor to the other segments of the circulation system. For most of its length, the roadway itself has two lanes in each direction with pockets of on- street parking.



Historic walnut tree

Around intersections or busy crossings, an additional turn lane is added to the Corridor. The typical roadway right-of-way width ranges from 100 to 150 feet with a curb-to-curb width of around 84 feet.

Whittier Boulevard (also a state highway- Route 72) is the only major east-west arterial in the City stretching seven miles from I-605 to the Whittier/La Habra city limit. As a regional roadway traversed by County residents, traffic is constant along its lanes throughout the day, and retail establishments have capitalized

on this through-traffic. However, the convenience form of auto oriented retail has produced a linear Corridor without much of a street edge, where cheaply built, unattractive buildings are set back from the road by overwhelming amount of parking fields, and where more attention is paid to signage than to architecture. The actual fabric of the City, which consists primarily of well-loved neighborhoods and community-focused gathering places, remains unknown and unseen. A wall of commercial land uses separate the City from the Boulevard and any connection to Whittier's neighborhoods is obscured by indistinct design.

The character of the roadway shifts as one moves down its length, and this character is for the most part defined by groupings of similar uses. The character of each segment is also evidenced by the parcel sites and shapes that support these uses, as shown on Illustration 3: Existing Conditions- Ownership Pattern. The first portion of the Boulevard is dominated by a tight fabric of local-serving retail, such as liquor stores, convenience marts and video rental establishments. The structures are small in scale, older, and often in poor condition, and the buildings are set close to the roadway, with only a single bay of parking in front, and larger parking lots set behind the buildings. Because the lots along this portion of the Corridor reflect older development patterns, the parcelization of the land is shallow, which limits the amount of parking that can be provided on-site. The most recent development along this portion of the Corridor, a shopping mall at Hadley Street called The Marketplace, included streetscape improvements along Whittier Boulevard, such as a winding pedestrian sidewalk buffered from the roadway, roadside flower plantings and a landscaped median.

The uses lining the next segment of Whittier Boulevard are larger in scale and characterized by workplace-type development, ranging from offices to industrial and manufacturing. Beginning at Sorenson Avenue, the roadside development pattern changes to show larger building footprints set back from the roadway. The uses range from low-rise office buildings and storage uses to a juvenile detention center and warehouses. The agglomeration of employers near the intersection, including major ones such as Kaiser Permanente, Leggett and Platt Manufacturing and the Presbyterian Hospital, create a center of workplace activity. This segment terminates at the City's major crossroads, the Five-Points Intersection of East and West Whittier Boulevard, Washington Boulevard, Santa Fe Springs and Pickering Avenue



Larger workplace-type development setback from roadway



Railroad iron trestle bridge creates an important focal point for the corridor



Residential fabric fronts the corridor

(located about two miles south of I-605). Because of its central location and high visibility as an arrival point from surrounding cities, the 5-Points Intersection creates an important focal point for the Corridor. The Union Pacific railway line, soon to become a recreational greenway through the city, passes over Whittier Boulevard at the 5-Points Intersection via an iron trestle bridge. The City has recognized the importance of the intersection with street and landscape improvements, including a wide tree-lined median that dramatizes the entrance from the west, and a grove of palm trees at the crossroads center.

Following the Corridor eastward, the railroad bridge acts as a threshold to the next part of the Corridor, a discontinuous stretch of commercial, service, and office development. Immediately east of the bridge, the uses along the Corridor range from general retail to automobile support to lodging. Again, due to the age of the development, the parcels are shallow, and visible roadside parking is limited. At the southwest corner of Whittier and Painter Boulevard, redevelopment after the 1987 earthquake has resulted in the creation of The Quad, a shopping center that draws its patrons from throughout the region. The success of The Quad has spurred further commercial development on adjacent and nearby parcels, and the area has a strong concentration of newer retail. In the past, automobile dealerships maintained a strong presence along this portion of the corridor, but many have scaled back operation or have discontinued business due to emerging economic conditions.

Further down the Corridor, residential pockets begin to appear along the Corridor. Between Jacklyn and Boyer Streets, neighborhoods abut the south side of the roadway so that some units side Whittier Boulevard. Further east, on the north side of the Boulevard between La Entrada and La Puebla, houses are set back from the Corridor by a separate road providing on-street parking and access to the residences. The East Whittier Middle School, at Catalina Avenue, is in some sense an anchor for the nearby residential neighborhoods. Retail uses exist along this part of the roadway as well, but the impact of their presence is reduced by the visibility of residential landscaping and minimal signage.

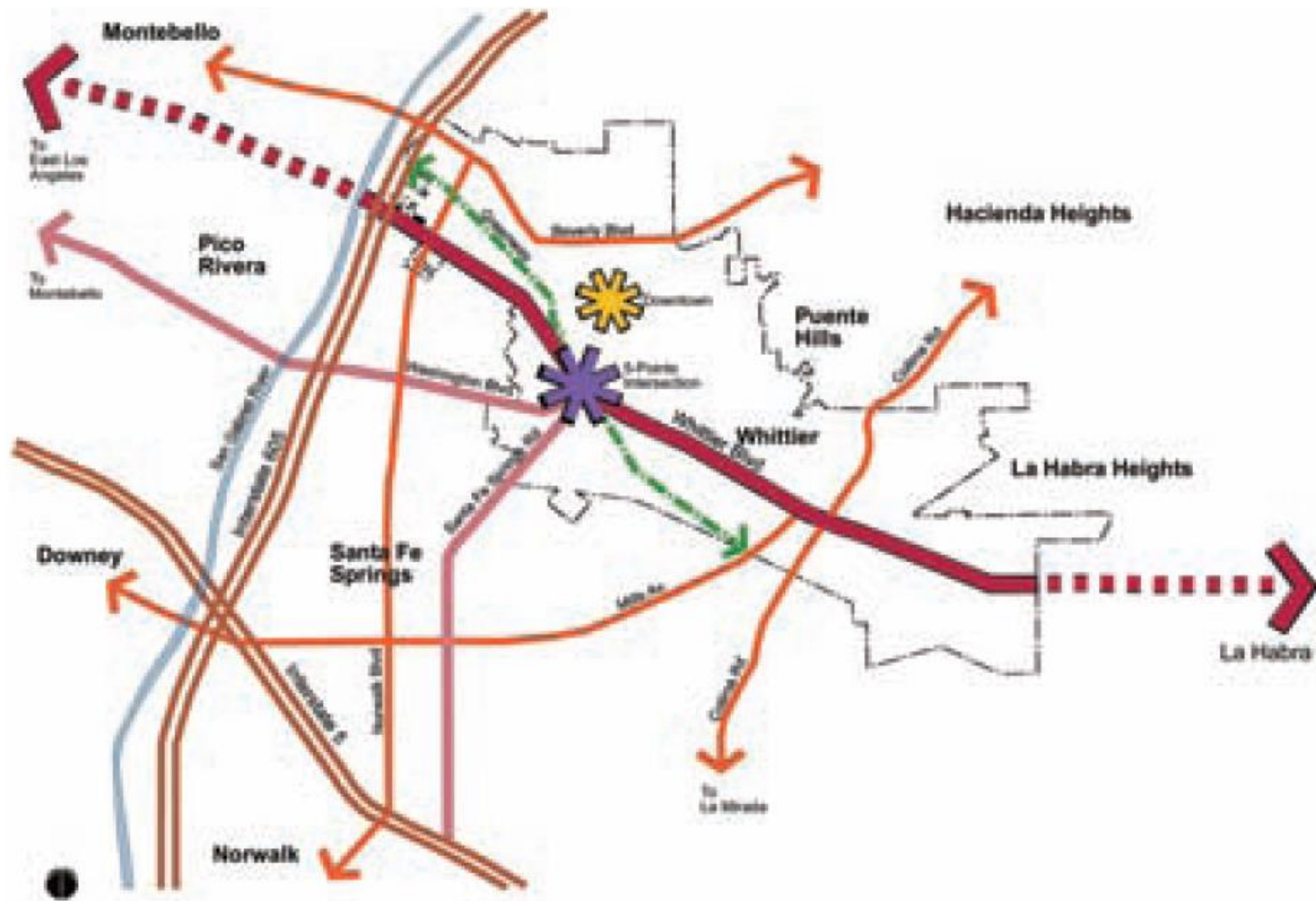


Illustration 2: Existing Conditions- Regional Context

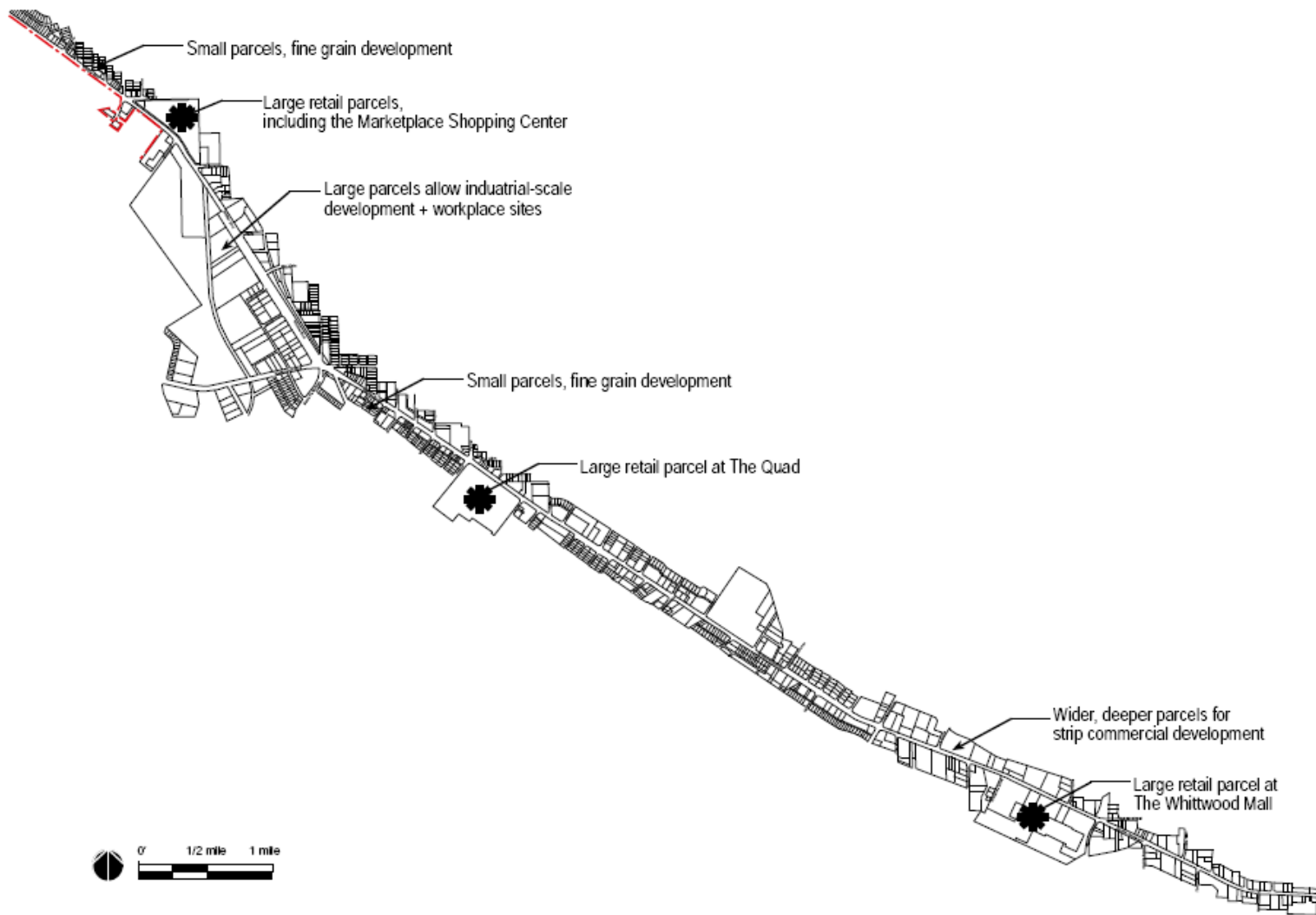


Illustration 3: Existing Conditions-Ownership Pattern

At the Whittwood Mall just east of Scott Street, Whittier Boulevard becomes typical of the commercial boulevards found all throughout southern California. The uses along the Corridor are mixed, with offices and service developments next to retail strip centers. The largest single development along this length is the Whittwood Mall itself, an older, enclosed retail center that is beginning to show signs of disinvestment. The Whittwood is sited on a deep parcel and is separated from the road by an overabundance of parking, with several complementary uses such as a 24-Hour Fitness and a movie theater to its rear. The number of vacancies in the mall, combined with the poor conditions of nearby buildings and a lack of new investment anywhere in the immediate area, all point to the need for revitalization or redevelopment. The least successful length of commercial roadway occurs as one moves toward the City limits, at the eastern tip of the Corridor, evidenced by the lack of activity along the street and by vacancies in its numerous strip centers.



Whittwood Mall, an older retail center



A number of vacant and operating auto dealerships exist along the corridor

c. Land Use and Development

There is a strict distinction between the land use occurring throughout the city and that along Whittier Boulevard. The City of Whittier is predominantly a residential community, with strong neighborhoods ranging from modest to high-end. The majority of the City's commercial land uses sprawl along Whittier Boulevard; the only other retail concentration in the City exist in its old city center, at Uptown. The types of commercial establishments found along Whittier Boulevard range from locally-oriented shops and services to "big-box" type retail and regional malls. Businesses and industries along the Corridor include professional services, retail stores, hotels and motels, and automobile sales and services. Major retail centers along Whittier Boulevard include the enclosed regional Whittwood Mall; The Quad, an outdoor discount hub; and The Marketplace, a neighborhood center. Segments of the Corridor tend to display a similarity of uses and scales- as described above, the Corridor shifts from locally-focused retail, to larger workplace, industrial and manufacturing uses, to regionally-focused commercial sites, to residential neighborhoods, to generic strip development. Along certain portions of the Corridor, concentrations of auto-oriented uses are evident, ranging from body shops and repair sited near Whittier Boulevard's intersection with Greenleaf Road, to operating and vacant auto dealerships located at numerous points further east. The uses on Whittier Boulevard are shown on Illustration 4: Existing Conditions-Land Use and Development.



Vacant building on the corridor

Because of the overabundance of commercial uses along the Corridor, and the similarity of what they provide, the supply of retail establishments along Whittier Boulevard may be greater than the population of Whittier can support. Many retail and service uses are struggling, and several “for lease” signs were noted. There are vacant lots and buildings scattered along the Corridor, particularly towards its eastern end, and other sites are clearly not being used to their market potential. These vacant lots and buildings are documented on Illustration 5: Existing Conditions-Vacant and Vulnerable Sites.



East Whittier Middle School acts as an anchor for nearby residential neighborhoods

Whittier is a mature community, with development dating back to the late 1800’s. Growth throughout the southern California region, particularly in the last several decades, has resulted in a mostly built-out fabric covering the City’s lands, with only a small portion of undeveloped land lying in the Puente Hills. There is almost no open space along the Corridor, with the exception of an unused green wedge at the Boulevard’s intersection with Hadley Street. Notable civic uses are confined to the East Whittier Middle School, between Catalina and Highland Avenues and the Whittier Hospital, at Colima Road. As noted, residential uses can be seen along Whittier Boulevard, but for the most part the city’s residential neighborhoods are hidden behind the Corridor’s wall of retail.

d. Existing Land Use Policy

Zoning for the City of Whittier is set forth in the Land Use Plan of the City of Whittier General Plan. Most of the land along Whittier Boulevard follows a similar pattern: the parcels directly fronting the Corridor are designated Commercial, bordered to the rear by thin buffer of higher density residential (usually one to two parcels deep), with single-family residential neighborhoods directly behind.



Philadelphia Street - “Design Corridor”

The majority of the Corridor’s parcels are designated for exclusively commercial uses, with a large segment of manufacturing from Hadley Street to the Five-Points Intersection. Residentially zoned areas are spread along the Corridor: the site of the Fred R. Nelles School for Boys, across from Philadelphia Street, is zoned for single-family residential, as well as the areas between Jacmar and Boyar Avenues on the south side, and La Entrada and La Puebla Avenues on the north side. Other residential zones along the Corridor include light multi-family residential between Pacific Place and Pickering Avenue, and a mix of heavy multi-family residential and single-family residential between Catalina and Highland Avenues.

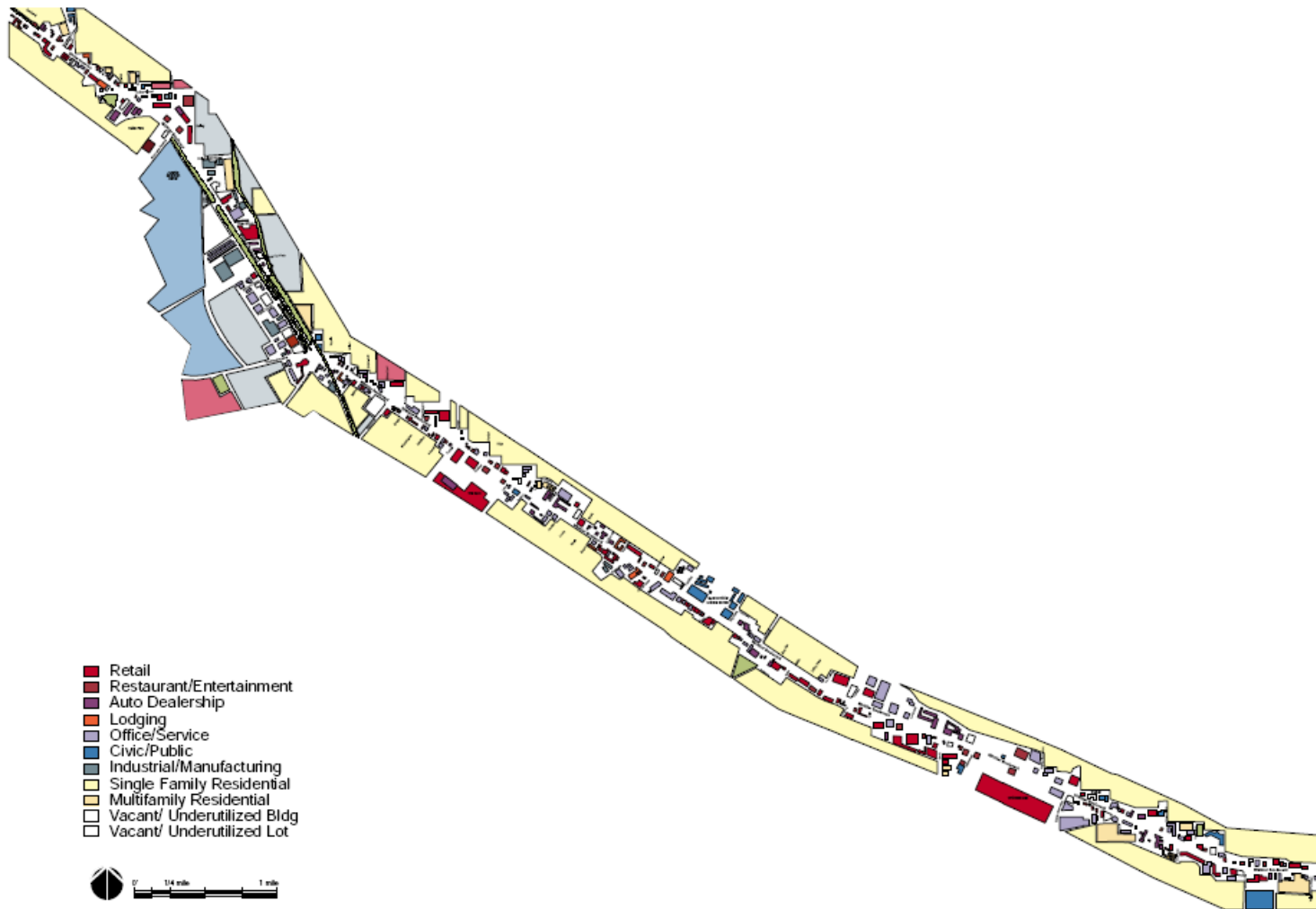


Illustration 4: Existing Conditions-Land Use and Development

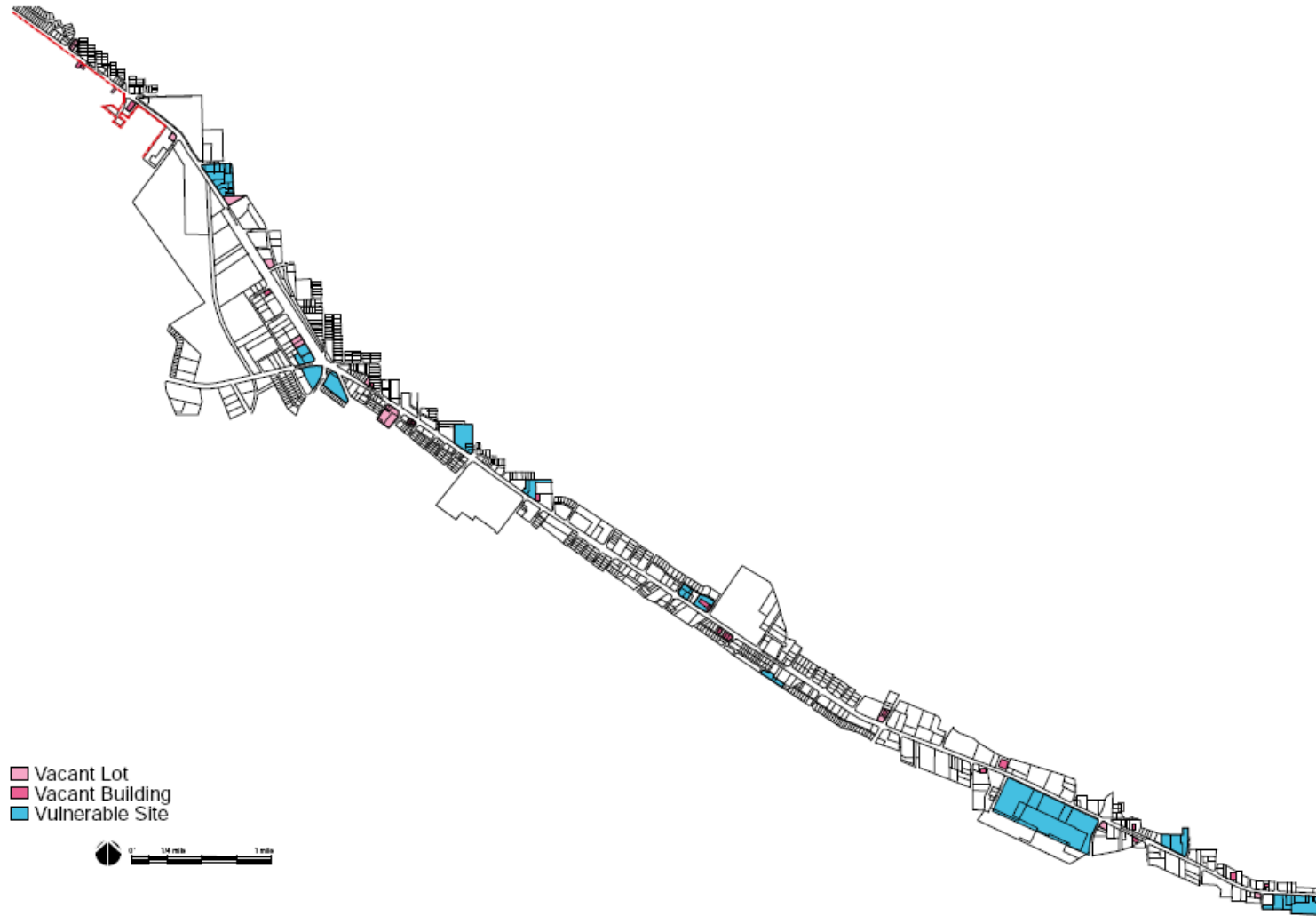


Illustration 5: Existing Conditions-Vacant and Vulnerable Sites

Whittier Boulevard, Hadley, Philadelphia and Colima Streets, and Greenleaf and Painter Avenues have been designated as “Design Corridors” by the 1993 General Plan, in order to maintain and improve their visual qualities. The Environmental Resource Management Element of the Plan dictates standards for Scenic and Design Corridors; these include the requirement of landscaping plans, signage controls, and trail coordination along the Corridors, design standards for new development, and special treatment at gateway and entry points. Development plans for sites along these Corridors are subject to design review to ensure new development maintains the scenic integrity of the streets and their views out to the Puente Hills.

The City has established “Urban Design Districts” along portions of Whittier Boulevard, Greenleaf Avenue, Philadelphia and Hadley Streets, as an overlay zone with additional allowances and requirements. These districts go beyond the visual concerns of Design Corridors to address the revitalization and improvement of these four key Corridors, in order to enhance the quality of development within the districts. At Whittier Boulevard, this designation requires the preparation of design standards or a Specific Plan for any new development. The overlay permits mixed-use developments that include a combination of commercial and residential land uses, and its intent is to focus and concentrate commercial development at key nodes along the Corridor. Along Greenleaf Avenue, Hadley and Philadelphia Streets between Whittier Boulevard and Uptown, the Urban Design District designation focuses on the upgrading and improvement of these highly visible links to the Uptown Area. Along Hadley Street and Greenleaf Avenue, this category also requires the preparation of design standards or a Specific Plan, and permits mixed-use developments with cooperating commercial and residential land uses.

e. *Economic Conditions*

In September 2001, Keyser Marston Associates (KMA) completed an economic market analysis evaluating the current conditions and potential development opportunities for the Whittier Boulevard Corridor (For the full Economic Market Analysis, see Appendix C). Economic analysis confirmed that Whittier has an oversupply of retail uses. While local serving retail establishments, particularly grocery and drug stores are performing well, the amount of demand for this type of retail is limited by population, and Whittier is currently meeting that demand. A significant amount of existing retail along the



Whittier Boulevard is the central spine of the City's circulation system

Whittier Boulevard is performing at a sub-par level, especially those categories of apparel, general merchandise, home furnishings and appliance stores. Smaller retail sites (i.e. less than one-acre) in particular are generating very little value beyond the actual worth of the land. Because of Whittier's location away from freeway frontage, and because of the strong regional serving retail concentrations in nearby cities, Whittier is losing, and will continue to lose, sales dollars to regional serving retail concentrations in nearby cities. While office demand was found to be limited, KMA did find a market niche related to medical office development, due to the concentration of medical office development, as well as hospitals, in Whittier. KMA research indicated that additional office development is likely to be focused on health service tenants, with a possible demand of up to 100,000 square feet of office space over the next Residential KMA found the greatest demand for the City focused on the residential sector. The high demand for housing in the market area, combined with continued population growth within this part of Los Angeles County, is in stark contrast with a limited supply of new housing units. Economic analysis also cited two residential projects that have recently been developed on major thoroughfares similar to Whittier Boulevard in nearby cities, as examples of the type of housing being built throughout the region to service this demand.

f. *Traffic and Circulation Patterns*



Five-Points intersection

Whittier Boulevard is the major arterial that plays a strong role in the circulation network of Los Angeles County, connecting several cities and eventually leading to the downtown of Los Angeles. It is the central spine of Whittier's circulation system in the City, crossing it from Pico Rivera at the City's western boundary, to La Habra on its east, as shown in Illustration 6:Existing Conditions-Circulation. Current traffic counts suggest that it will remain a major thoroughfare for the region and recent reports state that Whittier Boulevard carries a total of 42,000 vehicles per day. The minor arterials and important secondary streets that traverse it provide connections to other neighboring cities. The most high-traffic intersections along the Corridor occur at the cross streets of Hadley, Greenleaf, Painter and Colima, and at the Five-Points juncture where East and West Whittier Boulevard, Washington Boulevard, Santa Fe Springs Road and Pickering Avenue come together.

Hadley and Philadelphia Streets, and Greenleaf and Painter Avenues are the principal links connecting the Boulevard to the Uptown area. However, these connections are poorly marked, and despite their designation as “Design Corridors”, the architecture and landscaping along these routes do little to indicate their importance as gateways to Uptown. Their intersections with Whittier Boulevard are unremarkable, and represent a missed opportunity to connect the Boulevard with the City’s Center. Another key intersection is at Whittier Boulevard – Colima Road, a very busy crossing east of Five-Points. Colima Road, also designated a “Design Corridor”, provides the most direct route to the Puente Hills, but again, this significance is not reflected at its intersection with Whittier Boulevard.

The Five-Points intersection is the threshold dividing West and East Whittier Boulevards. Its unique configuration, a meeting point of five roads of varying function and intensity, as well as its location near the center of Whittier Boulevard, and its function as an arrival point for visitors traveling to Whittier from the south, all point to the powerful role that Five Points plays as a centerpiece for the City of Whittier; however, this importance is not reflected by a strength of character at the Intersection.

While traffic flow moves through the intersection fairly efficiently, the crossing is not pedestrian friendly, and attempting to traverse the intersection by foot can be both tedious and dangerous. Visually, the intersection has some very compelling elements: the City has invested in landscaping improvements, including a tree-lined median along one’s approach from the west, and a palm grove at the intersection’s center; and the overpass of the railroad lends the intersection some character. But nearby buildings have no particular relationship, in either footprint or function, to the intersection, and the types of establishments currently located at the intersection’s most prominent parcels (Shoe City and a drive-through car wash) does not make the most of a key location. Sparse development, insignificant architecture, and an accumulation of loud signage, compounded with the visual noise of nearby billboards, detract from the intersection’s importance as a pivotal moment at the center of the Corridor. Public transit patrons are not well-served along the Boulevard. Currently, Montebello Bus Line 50 intersects Whittier Boulevard at the Five Points intersection and at the Whittier Boulevard/Painter intersection; Montebello’s Line 10 and MTA’s Line 18 also run along Whittier Boulevard (this route will likely

be taken over by Montebello's service in the coming year. Montebello Bus Lines also plans to extend the Line 40 Beverly Blvd. service out to one of these hubs in the future. Current conditions show Line 50 running about every 30 minutes, and Line 10 every ten minutes. No buses serve the part of the Corridor between Hadley Street and Five Points.

The nearest Metrolink stops are the Norwalk Center and Montebello stations. Both are about the same distance from the City, but Norwalk is more convenient for Whittier residents. While there is no direct link to either station now, the City is planning to establish a commuter shuttle from the historic Train Depot to Norwalk Center. Also, a new rapid bus service is initiating service from downtown Los Angeles along heavily traveled Wilshire Boulevard, continuing east on Whittier Boulevard as far as Montebello.



The roadway of Whittier Boulevard

Regional bus routes connect Whittier to the rest of Los Angeles County. Montebello has three bus lines that come into Whittier, including one that continues along Whittier Boulevard to stop at the Whittwood Mall. The MTA has a local stop at the Whittwood Mall as well. Other regional lines, including Foothill Transit, and the Orange County Transit Authority, have expressed interest in connecting to Whittier, but a coordinated plan to link these systems together has not yet been developed.

g. Recreation and Open Space

The Puente Hills are the major open space resource in the City. At the City's western edge, the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel River spreading grounds run along the San Gabriel River from Washington Boulevard to Whittier Boulevard, and the San Gabriel River Trail leads to the Whittier Narrows, a funnel of green along the Rio Hondo between the Puente and Montebello hills. Other open spaces and recreational opportunities within the City of Whittier consist mainly of neighborhood and community parks.



View of Puente Hills

There is, however, very little open space on or adjacent to the Corridor itself, as demonstrated in Illustration 7: Public Realm diagram. The only significant public space within the Specific Plan Area is the Corridor itself: the roadway and its sidewalks. In contrast, while there is little open space that can be used by pedestrians in the study area, there is an abundance of unbuilt land that is dedicated to serving the automobile. The vast amount of parking lots, access roads and paved area is shown on Illustration 8: Auto Serving Surfaces.

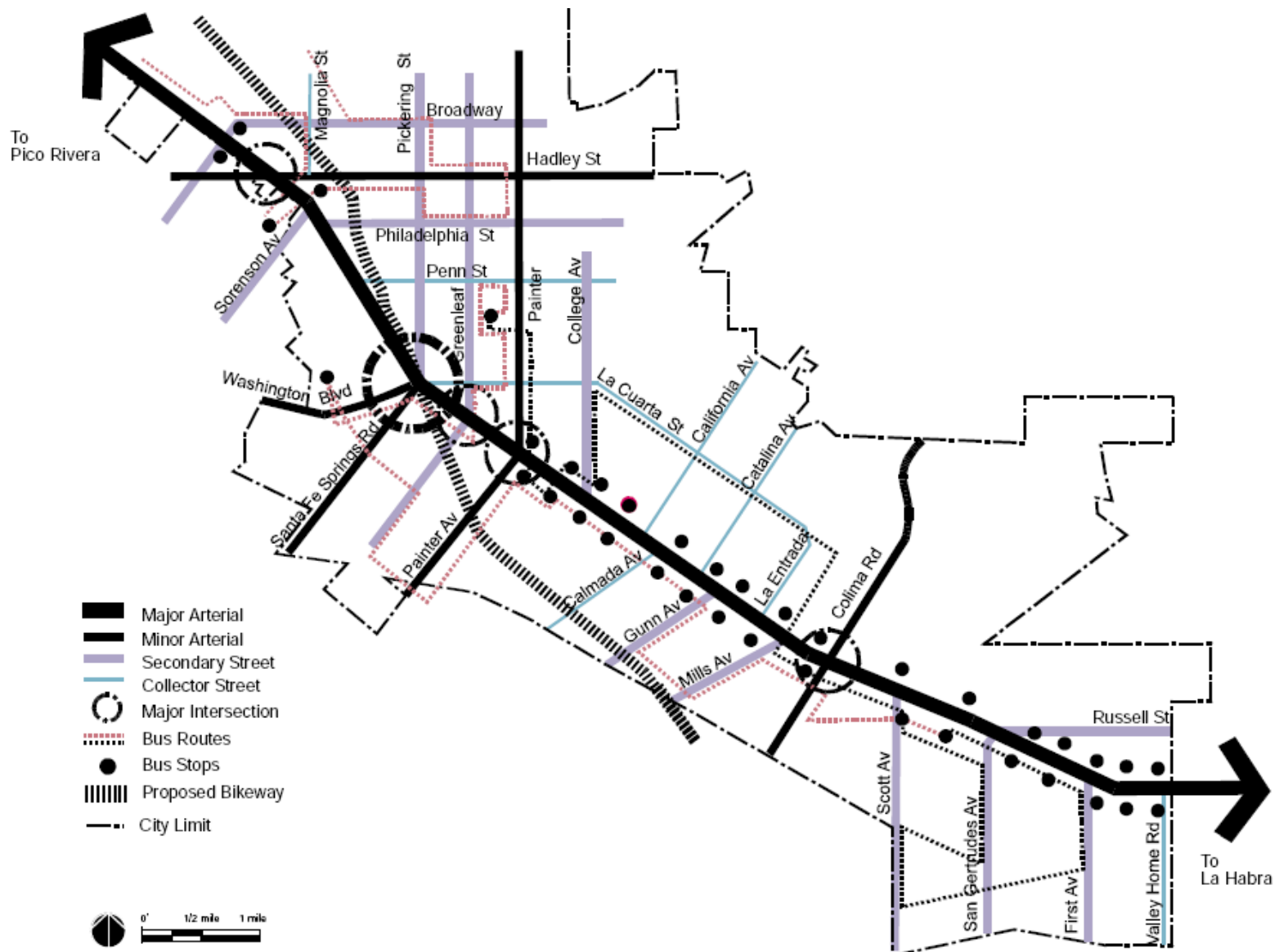


Illustration 6: Existing Conditions-Circulation

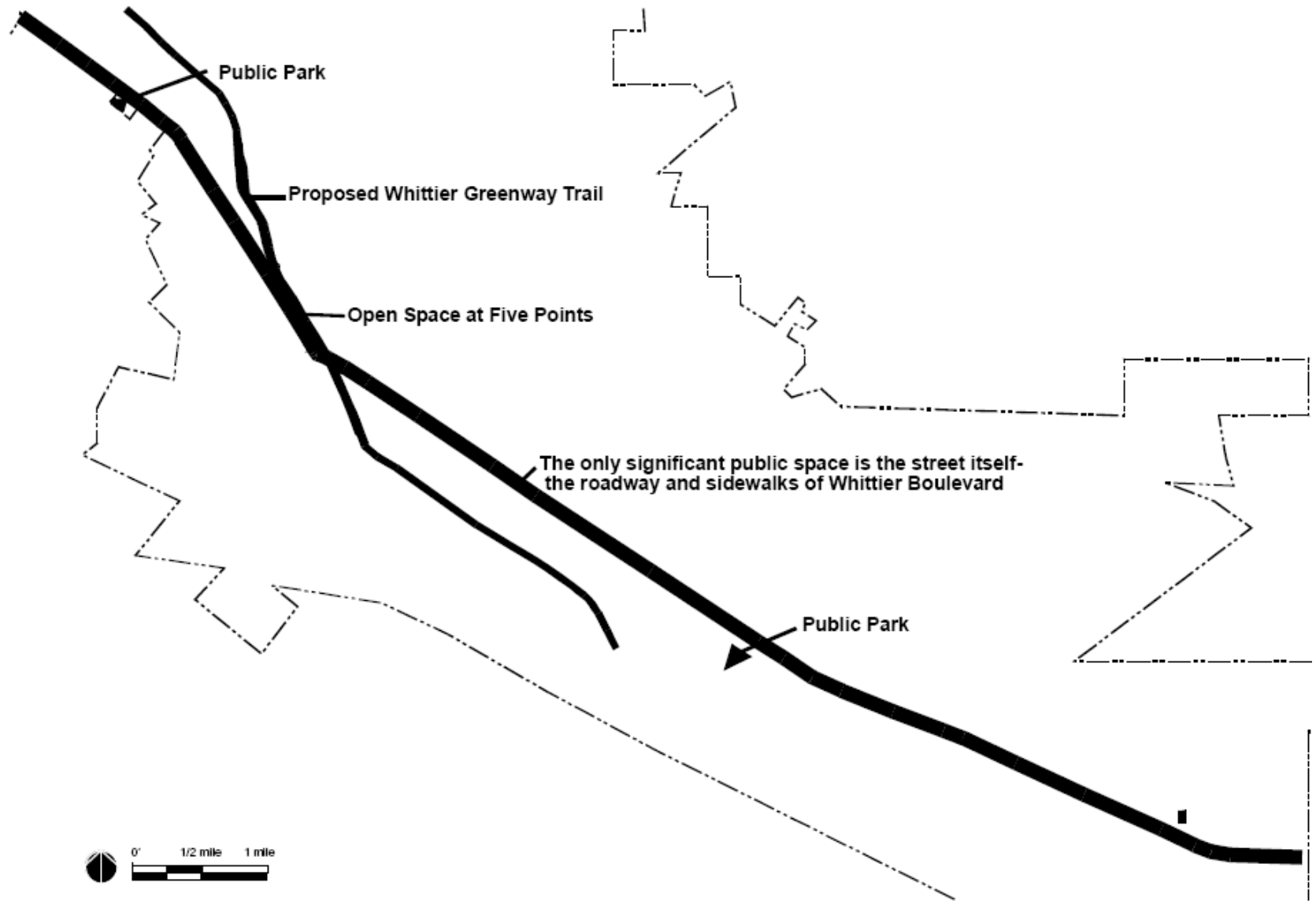


Illustration 7: Existing Conditions-Public Realm

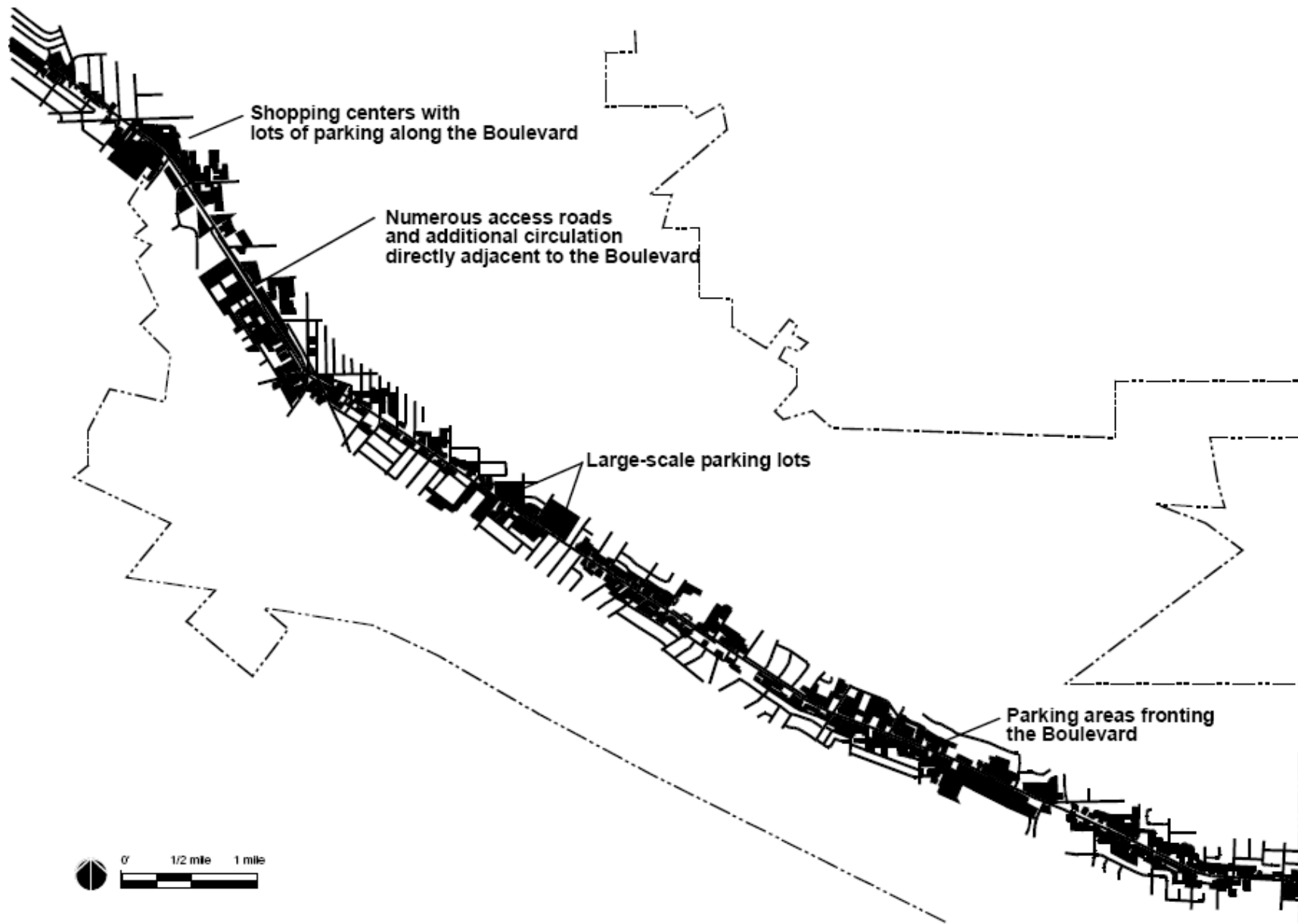


Illustration 8: Existing Conditions-Auto-Serving Surfaces

There are several trails in the area, including the Skyline Trail along the Puente Hills, the Los Angeles River Bike trail which crosses Whittier Boulevard west of the City, and the San Gabriel River bike path running from Azusa to Seal Beach. A bikeway through Whittier is in development: the city has struck a bargain with Union Pacific Railroad to buy 5.1 miles of abandoned railroad right-of-way to develop a long-sought Whittier Greenway Trail. The proposed bicycle/pedestrian trail will bisect the city diagonally from the southeast corner to the northwest, where it will link with the San Gabriel River Bike Trail. The project is expected to reach completion in about two years.

h. Whittier's Architectural Character

Whittier's existing historical architecture reflects a variety of styles. Most of its early surviving architecture is residential, and includes styles that are reflective of the city's Quaker heritage, as well as turn-of-the-century styles including Victorian, Craftsman and Colonial Revival. Later residential styles show a Spanish Colonial or Mediterranean influence.



Residential architecture reflects a variety of styles

The Quaker aesthetic is a very simple one that uses wood and timber construction as its base. Its clean lines and severe styling, utilizing plain framing, and timber supports, are reminiscent of East Coast styles. Front porches and low-pitched roofs are common. Most of Whittier's examples of this Quaker/Craftsman style exist in its residential architecture, most typically the bungalow, but the old Train Dept, represents a civic version of this building type.



Whittier's historic train depot

The Spanish and Mediterranean architecture found throughout Whittier blends the traditions of several cultures: Spain, Mexico, and the entire Mediterranean world; examples falling in this range are often referred to as Spanish Colonial or Mission Revival. The result is a highly refined, finely detailed version of Spanish Mission architecture- while it borrows that tradition's simple forms, thick stucco walls, deeply inset openings, and light coloring, it adds a finer grain of detail in both material and style, adding wrought iron, elaborately carved wood, and classical detailing.

Early commercial architectural styles as evidenced by the historic buildings of Uptown Whittier, reveal an attention to detail and ornament, with decorated facades, special detailing at entrances, and deeply set, highly ornamented windows. Special materials used to give life to storefronts and ground

floors include colorful tile, terra cotta, timber detailing, and piers of stucco or brick. Red tile roofs are common, as is wrought iron detailing. The articulation found on building surfaces, however, is offset by their shape and scale; building masses are relatively simple, with expression given through the use of volumes like arcades and towers.

Uptown contains many restored buildings from the downtown's early beginnings. The Oil Building and the Mission Court, built in 1914 as headquarters of the producing department of Standard Oil, was restored after the 1987 earthquake and is one of the oldest remaining commercial buildings in Whittier. The Pio Pico Hacienda, on the outskirts of the City, is a historical tribute to the last Mexican governor of California. As the proud hometown of the late-president Richard Nixon, the City placed a bronze marker in the sidewalk at the entrance of his first office as an attorney. The desk he used is housed at the Whittier Museum along with other historical memorabilia from the city's beginnings.



Spanish colonial

Other important styles evidenced in the City's commercial architecture include Art Deco and Googie. Art Deco styling and architecture is found on historic buildings from the 1920's and 30's, particularly in Uptown. Its accents combine the streamlined styling of modernism with patterns and icons taken from Egypt, Greece and Rome, Africa, India, and Mayan and Aztec cultures. Its cubic forms and zigzag designs are found throughout Uptown on shops, banks and restaurants, even the Whittier Cinema. Several civic buildings, such as the Post Office, were also adorned in a restrained version of this style.



Art Deco

Googie architecture was one of the results of post-WWII car culture, named after the famous "Googie's" coffee shop in Los Angeles. Its features are more whimsical style, including sharp angles, loud signage, odd shapes, sweeping cantilevered roofs and pop-culture imagery, and were intended to capture the eye of drivers as they passed. Googie thrived on Whittier Boulevard, and on all suburban strips, in the 1950s and 1960s. While Googie for a time was decried as frivolous or crass, history has rediscovered its uniqueness and utility, and several of the buildings still standing on Whittier, like the car wash and bowling alley below, provide testament to this time period.



Googie style

This historic heritage, however, is not represented along Whittier Boulevard. The Boulevard's rise as a commercial Corridor corresponded with the "age of the automobile", and its architecture is indicative of shopping patterns based on

“drive-by” convenience. Prior to the construction of grade-separated freeways, Whittier Boulevard served as a high-speed arterial for the City and the region. The higher speed of travel along such thoroughfares instigated an entirely new scale of commercial buildings and signage. Fine detail and ornament was no longer relevant to retailers, and commercial architecture was reduced to the simplest, most economical form- usually, a box. The older buildings along Whittier Boulevard reflect the mindset of this era, and most recent development has repeated this pattern. Primacy is placed on signage visibility and availability of parking; large, simple buildings fronted by asphalt announce convenience and ease of movement. Structures are built to catch the eye of automobile traveler, with a simple mass, but a strong silhouette. Ornamentation is minimal, except for signage. Parking fronts or surrounds the building. Variations on the Corridor retail type include the Strip, the Big-Box, and the Single Vendor; the Mall takes this same development type, of a single structure unrelated to the street, and blows it up to a much grander scale (see Illustration 9A and Illustration 9B: Retail Building Type). With the exception of some residual storefront-type retail, these types dominate the Corridor.

While a concentration of newer development exists at the Quad and on some of its adjacent parcels, many of the buildings along Whittier Boulevard are starting to show evidence of deterioration, with poorly maintained facades and outdated signage. The western end of the Corridor in particular is lined by older uses, and this is reflected by the declining state of many of its buildings.

Although single-family residential neighborhoods make up much of the city, there are only a few visible residential pockets along the Corridor. In most cases these neighborhoods are barely visible from Whittier Boulevard; they are buffered by landscaping, or they are setback a large enough distance to have little or no presence on the Corridor’s streetscape. There is a visual cacophony along the Boulevard, with distracting signage and lots of billboards, which further decreases the impact of the architecture along the Corridor.

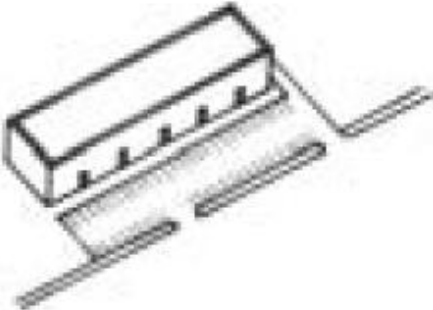

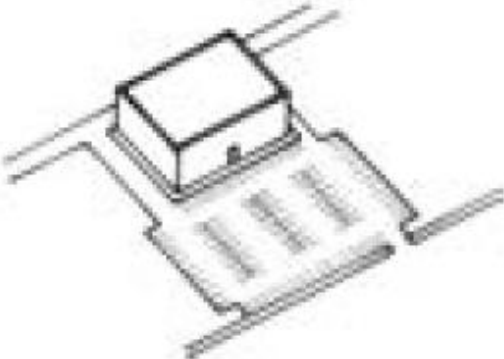

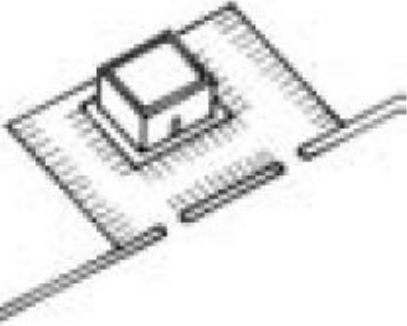

	RETAIL BUILDING TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS	EXAMPLES
Strip		<p><i>One-story building with several tenants separated from the road by 1-2 bays of parking.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retail entrances are set back behind parking, and removed from sidewalk. - Building has monotonous appearance; individual stores have no identity. 	
Big Box		<p><i>Individual freestanding business fronted by a large parking area.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building has no connection to other retailers. - Building has no connection to pedestrian realm or to street. - Storefront and merchandise is not visible from street - only the parking is! 	
Single Vendor		<p><i>Individual small scale business surrounded by parking.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building is set in sea of asphalt. - Business is isolated, and cannot share customers or parking with nearby stores. 	

Illustration 9a: Retail Building Types Diagram 1

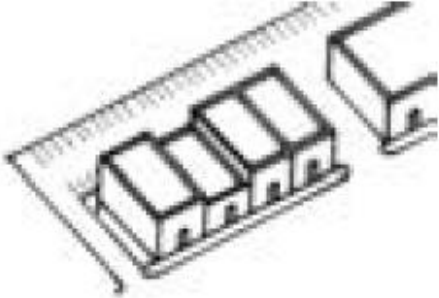

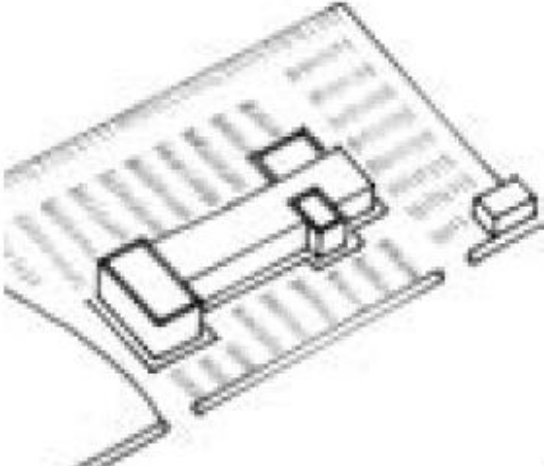

	RETAIL BUILDING TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS	EXAMPLES
Storefront		<p><i>Multiple contiguous shops built to property line, with parking behind.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entrances are accessed directly from sidewalk! - Stores are visible to pedestrians and to cars. - Street frontage is activated by retail. - Parking is hidden from view. 	
Shopping Center		<p><i>Large single structure with interior access to multiple tenants.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No shops or businesses are visible from the road. - Surrounded by an overabundance of parking. - Very few pedestrian entrances, and these are hard to find. - All circulation and activity is internally-oriented. 	

Illustration 9b: Retail Building Types Diagram 2

2.4 Summary of Existing Conditions

The City of Whittier has many defining characteristics that have grown out of the rich history of a Quaker past, the Spanish influence of the region, and its strong identity as a well-loved residential community. Whittier Boulevard serves as the vital backbone of this community in many ways, operating as its main location for retail activity, providing local connections between the various neighborhoods of the City, and supplying regional access both to and from the City. Whittier Boulevard functions as the entrance route for traffic entering into the City of Whittier; in a sense, Whittier Boulevard is the “front door” of the City.

But the significance of Whittier Boulevard is only reflected by its scale—not by its design, aesthetics, buildings or architecture. The Corridor does not represent the spirit of its City. The historic heritage, tightly knit neighborhoods, and significant natural amenity that the Whittier community is so proud of, is not represented along the Corridor. Whittier retains an “Old Village” atmosphere in the Uptown District; through planning and preservation efforts, the City has worked to maintain a memory of times gone by. Whittier contains many recreational opportunities, and the Puente Hills provide access to mountain trails and beautiful views to the north and east of the community. A strong regional character is evident in its residential architecture, and its neighborhoods are a source of pride for residents. But many of these assets remain hidden within the City’s fabric, and on the public front of Whittier Boulevard, there are few indicators of the story that is the City of Whittier.

Constant retail development, fronted by overwhelming amount of parking fields, has produced a type of linear Corridor typical to southern California, oriented to the automobile and unattractive to pedestrians. Large parcels and “big-box” buildings, setback from the roadway, sit as individual uses that occur again and again along the Corridor. Signage and billboards add visual noise to a streetscape unrelieved by trees or landscaping, except at a few locations where improvements have been implemented. Pedestrian-scaled amenities, such as street furniture, smaller-scaled lighting, and planting strips between the sidewalk and the roadway, are few and far between; although it is doubtful if improvements at the pedestrian level are even relevant for a thoroughfare where all of the uses are auto-oriented.



Whittier is proud of its tightly knit residential neighborhoods



“Big-box” type commercial development

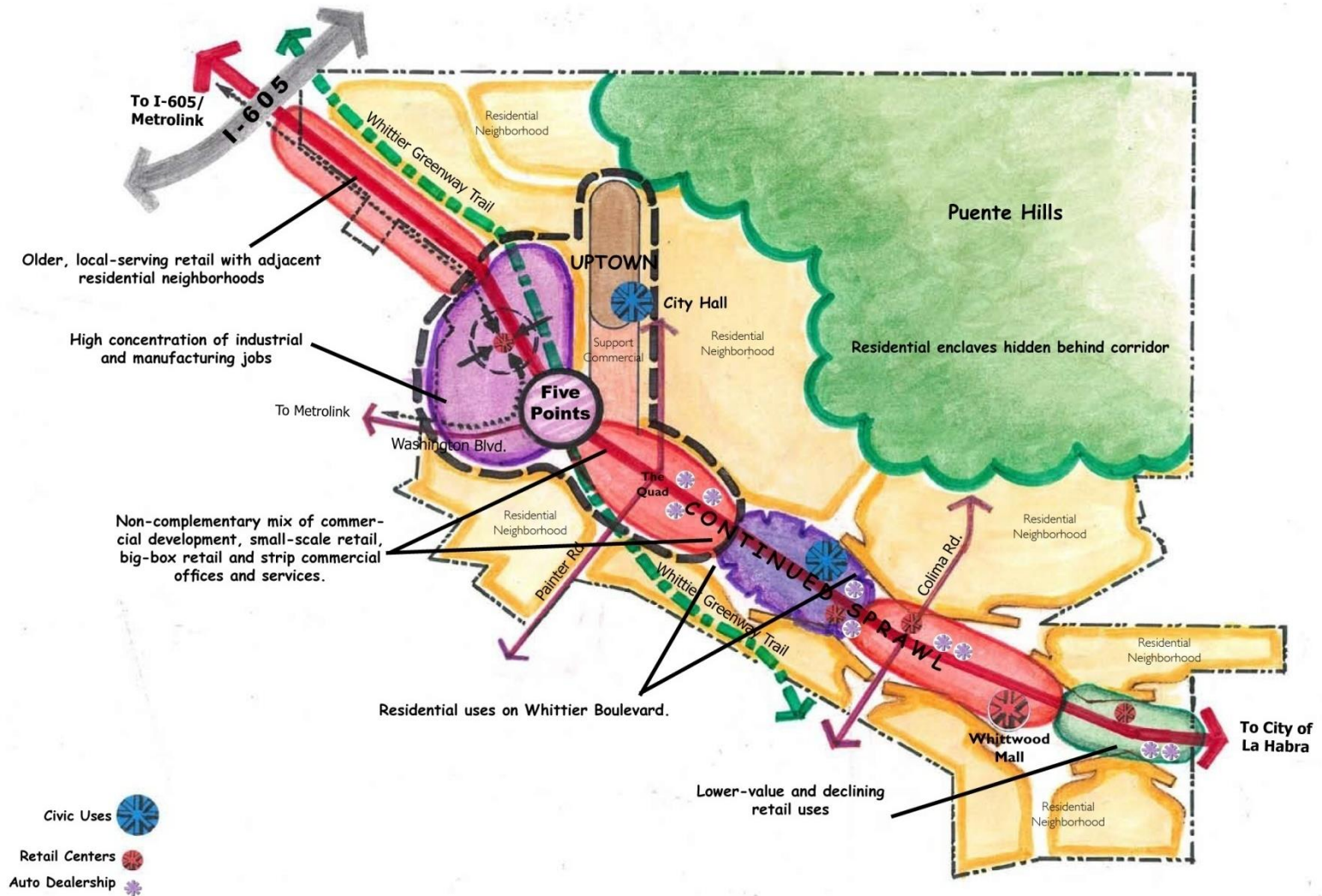


Illustration 10: Patterns of Development and Change

Over time, as more and more commercial uses have sprung up on Boulevard frontage, retail activity along the length of the Corridor has increased to the point where existing sales are weakened by over-saturation. The discontinuous sprawl of retail along the Corridor, interspersed by office and service buildings, means that there are no nodes of concentration where retailers could benefit from one another, and the fact that the distances between them can only be traversed by car further decreases any symbiotic relationship stores and shops might have.

As the first thing most visitors to Whittier will encounter, and as a daily part of most residents' daily travels, Whittier Boulevard is an integral part of one's impression of the City of Whittier. It has been allowed to develop in a manner archetypal to the Los Angeles area, and is in many ways a conventional strip lined with regionally-oriented retail, indistinctive uses and characterless buildings. It is a Corridor that could exist anywhere in the region. But Whittier Boulevard is not just another anonymous strip in southern California- it is the central spine of the City of Whittier, and its activity and design should exhibit the City's pride. Whittier Boulevard needs to reflect the character of its community, to mirror its public and its population; it needs to become an integrated part of the City of Whittier.



Cacophonous buildings and signage along Whittier Boulevard



Whittier's "front door" should reflect the quality of the City