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## CHAPTER 2

# LAND, WATER AND TRANSPORTATION USE

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### ABSTRACT

Today, the East Thea Foss is experiencing a period of transition, away from heavy industry, characteristic of the Port of Tacoma, toward lighter industrial, commercial, and public land uses. Just across the waterway, the west side of the Thea Foss has already undergone an even greater transformation, departing from its industrial past to bring a host of retail, residential, cultural, and recreational uses to the waterfront. The City of Tacoma and Puget Sound Regional Council envision the east side of the Thea Foss as forming part of a buffer zone around the core area of the port's Manufacturing and Industrial Center (MIC). This chapter focuses on current land ownership; land, water, and transportation uses of the East Thea Foss; and the importance of creating a land use inventory prior to making new development determinations.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on land, water, and transportation uses of the East Thea Foss. Overall, land, water, and transportation uses are considerably different on the east side of the Thea Foss than on the west side of the waterway. Whereas the west side features condominiums, shops, restaurants, museums, and parks, the East Thea Foss continues to support industrial and maritime cargo uses more characteristic of a working port. Many of the industrial facilities throughout the East Thea Foss restrict public access to the waterway (Malloy, 2018).

Since 1873 when the Northern Pacific Railroad chose Tacoma as the western terminus for its transcontinental railroad, port development has been central to Tacoma's economic and political development as a city. For the last 100 years, the Port of Tacoma has served as an industrial and maritime center for the city and region (Port of Tacoma, n.d.). Over time, industrial growth along the Thea Foss Waterway contributed immense quantities of contaminants to local waterways and shorelines (Washington State Department of Ecology, n.d.). This led the US Army Corps of Engineers to designate the Thea Foss Waterway as part of the 12-acre Commencement Bay Superfund Site in 1983. Cleanup of the waterway and adjacent shorelines and tideflats began in 1994 and ended in 2006. Today, the City of Tacoma and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) continue to monitor the water quality of the Thea Foss Waterway (Washington State Department of Ecology, n.d.).

In his book, *America's Waterfront Revival*, Peter Hendee Brown describes four public port authorities which transitioned away from maritime cargo and industrial uses as a result of facing declining maritime cargo traffic. As cargo traffic decreased, each of the four ports was forced to find new revenue sources to support their urban waterfronts and maintain themselves relevant and viable. As land, water, and transportation uses changed, each of the four ports also experienced

"increased public scrutiny and reduced political autonomy" (Brown, 2009, p. 134).

Unlike the ports Brown refers to, which transitioned away from maritime cargo uses out of necessity, the Port of Tacoma continues to thrive as a working port. This is evidenced by a 34.1% increase in the Port's import volume between January, 2018 and January, 2019. Owing to the formal arrangement of the Ports of Tacoma and Seattle as the Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA), the Port of Tacoma stands to benefit from seven million square feet of new industrial warehousing space which will allow it to diversify its supply chain (Northwest Seaport Alliance, 2019).

***Although overall the Port of Tacoma continues to develop around industrial and maritime purposes, the East Thea Foss is subject to similar circumstances as those that Brown describes in his book, with conversion of land uses on the horizon.***

The Thea Foss Waterway is now experiencing a time of transition. In 1996, the City of Tacoma established the Foss Waterway Development Authority "to oversee development and marketing of the publicly-owned Foss Waterway properties" (Foss Waterway Development Authority, 2014). Since that time, the seven-member board of directors has managed development of the west side of the Thea Foss, ushering in the various mixed-uses which have transformed a previously industrial waterfront. The City of Tacoma and Puget Sound Regional Council plan to zone the East Thea Foss for light industrial and commercial uses, aiming to make it a transitional buffer zone between heavier industrial uses of the port and the uses of the west side of the Thea Foss, downtown Tacoma, and the Tacoma Dome District.

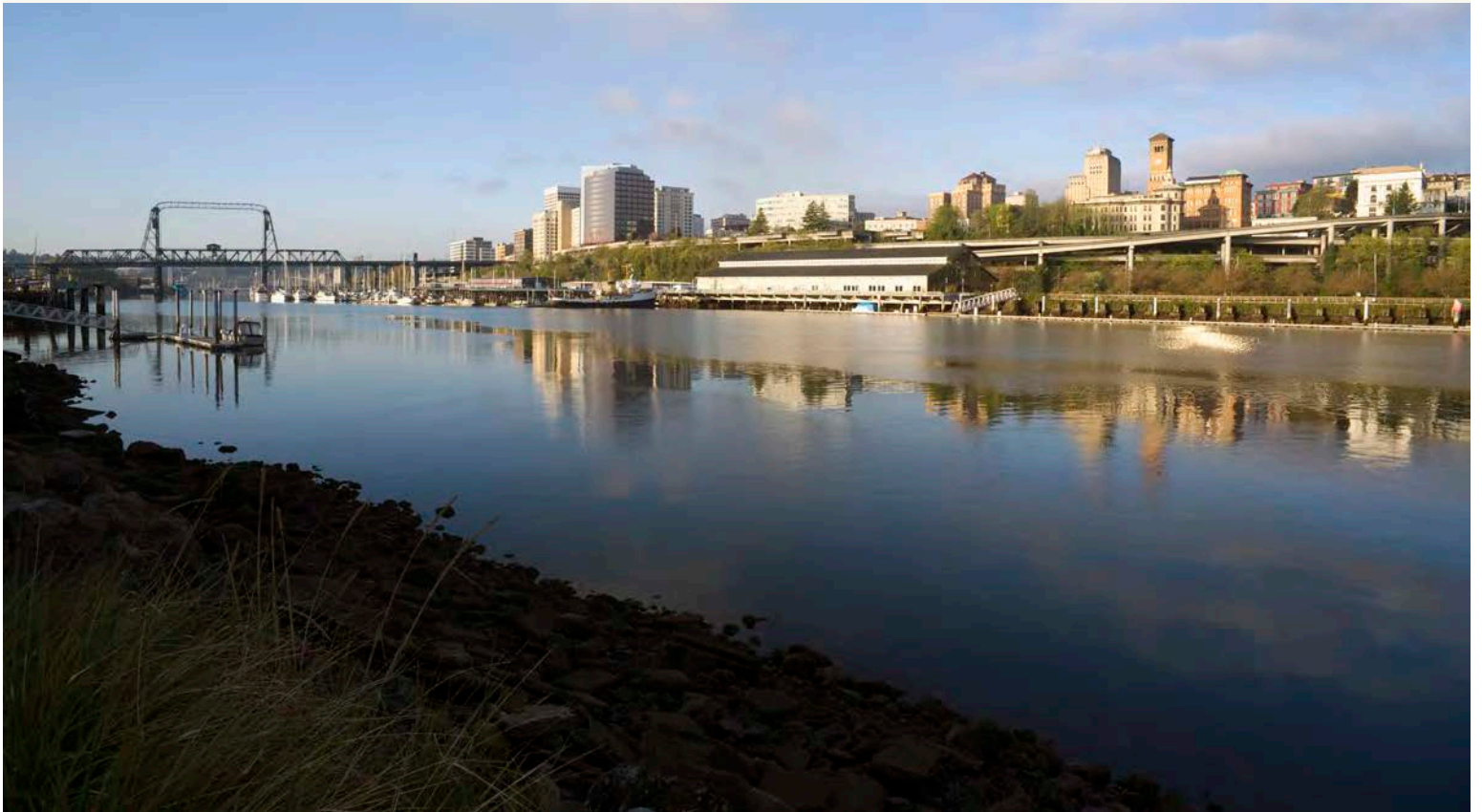
## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In our work, we have inventoried land, water, and transportation uses and created a map to illustrate how much land is available for development throughout the East Thea Foss, as well as the kinds of land uses that are allowed there. Scholars and researchers across the country and around the world tell us that such an inventory is crucial as it forms a visual guide that requires little in the way of written or oral interpretation.

We have considered transportation uses because of the centrality of transportation to industrial sites, noted by Green, Leigh, and Hoezel: “Transportation infrastructure, specifically roadways, is the most frequently cited infrastructure concern of

industrial business” (2015, p. 26). In order for urban industries to succeed, quick, reliable access to well-maintained truck routes and highways is essential.

Our team also connected with the Liz Kaster, manager of the Puyallup Watershed Initiative’s Active Transportation Community of Interest. Our goal was to discuss bus routes, trails, walkways, roadways, and transportation circulation for the East Thea Foss. Finally, our team worked with Professor Slager, from the University of Washington Tacoma Urban Studies department to create a map which shows current land ownership, zoning designations, transportation uses, and public access areas.

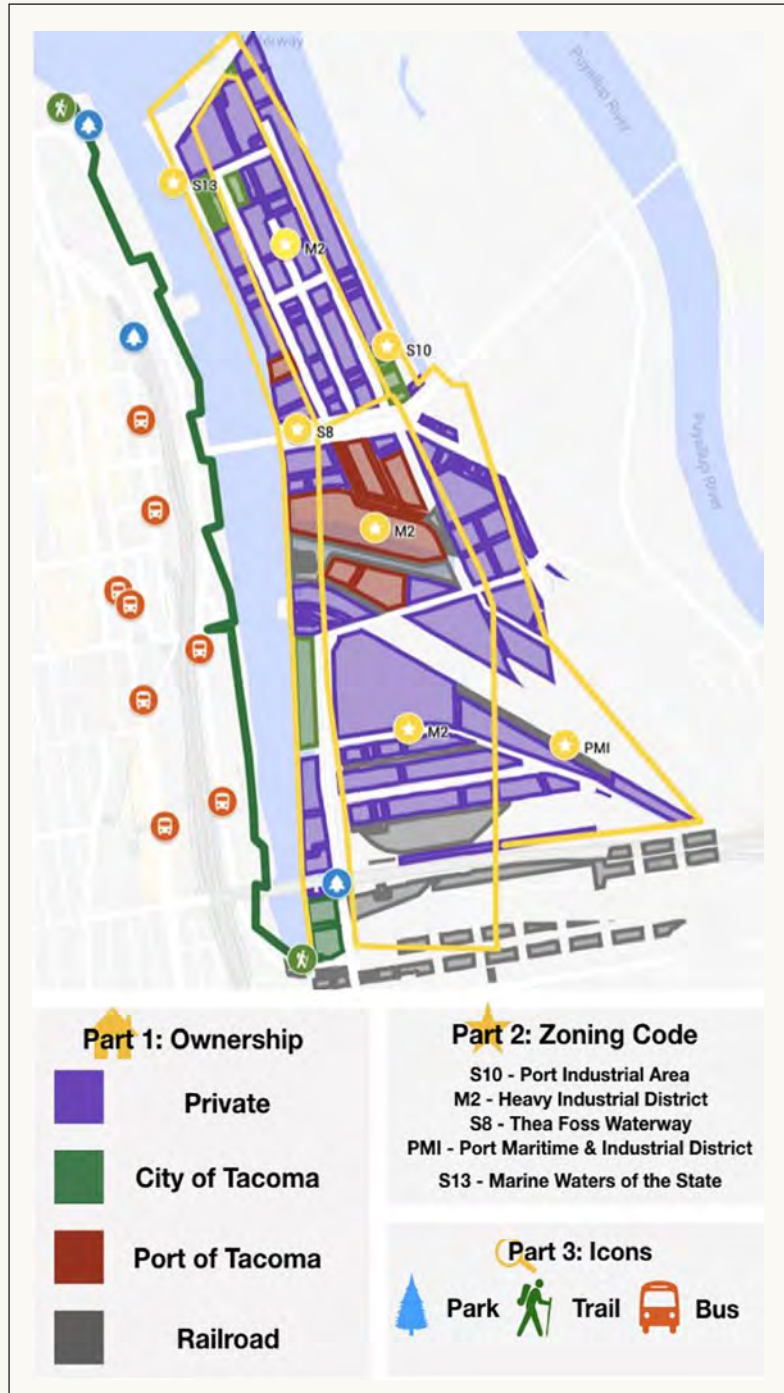


# STUDY RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

## OWNERSHIP MAP WITH PARCEL DIAGRAM

The ownership map provides a clear picture of the stakeholders who own parcels throughout the East Thea Foss. To protect the privacy of individuals, we labeled parcels by broad category: private, City of Tacoma, Port of Tacoma, and railroad. The East Thea Foss is used by numerous industrial facilities as well as by private businesses. A majority of lands are owned by private entities (90%). Few parcels are owned by the City of Tacoma, Port of Tacoma, and Washington State. In order to make the East Thea Foss safer and more accessible to residents, careful rezoning and redevelopment planning is necessary.

## OWNERSHIP AND ZONING DESIGNATIONS



## LAND USE ZONING: CODE DEFINITIONS

The East Thea Foss is subject to five different zoning designations: S10, S8, S13, W2 and PMI. Zones are defined below and represented by the accompanying map.

### S-10 PORT INDUSTRIAL AREA (HI)

Land Uses: Marinas, launch ramps and lifts, water dependent commercial development, water dependent/related port/industrial development, water oriented recreational development (biking/trails), interpretive/educational/other signs, seaplane floats, major/minor/accessory utilities, ecological restoration/enhancement and both non-maintenance and maintenance dredging (ArcGIS Web Application, 2019).

### M-2 - HEAVY INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Land Uses: Heavy industrial, warehousing, storage, vehicle service and repair (ArcGIS Web Application, 2019).

### S-8 THEA FOSS WATERWAY (DW)

Land Uses: Marinas, launch ramps and lifts, non-motorized boat launch, water dependent/related/enjoyment commercial development, water-dependent/related port/industrial development, water-oriented recreational development, major/minor/accessory utilities, interpretive/educational/other signs, ecological restoration/enhancement and maintenance dredging (ArcGIS Web Application, 2019).

### PMI - PORT MARITIME AND INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Land Uses: Heavy industrial, warehousing, storage, vehicle service and repair (ArcGIS Web Application, 2019).

### S-13 MARINE WATERS OF THE STATE

Land Use: Marinas, launch ramps and lifts, non-motorized boat launch, water dependent/related/enjoyment commercial development, water-dependent/related port/industrial development, water-oriented recreational development, major/minor/accessory utilities, interpretive/educational/other signs, ecological restoration/enhancement and maintenance dredging (ArcGIS Web Application, 2019).

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Currently there are no bus services or public access trails in the East Thea Foss. This is likely to change as a result of current planning to accommodate population growth. The City of Tacoma's current Transportation Master Plan presents a vision to construct facilities that will support walking, biking, transit, and driving alone as viable transportation modes. This Plan refers to creating bikeways and pedestrian ways to and through the East Thea Foss.

Transportation plans for the East Thea Foss will be executed in three stages. During the first stage, parking will be accounted for, with a goal to provide the minimum amount of parking deemed necessary. No businesses are allowed to have their own parking lots because of the scarcity of lands available. The second stage will involve adding a Pierce Transit shuttle bus service to the area. Whether to also include light rail service to the area will be evaluated after other development has occurred. The final implementation stage will include adding other facilities to accommodate a variety of transportation modes.



# STUDY RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

## PUBLIC ACCESS

Public access data shows there is one park and that there are no public trails in the East Thea Foss. The west side of the Thea Foss, on the other hand, provides linear public open space and pedestrian paths. In the future, trails could be added to the East Thea Foss to increase public access to the area.

Our team contacted the manager of the Puyallup Watershed Initiative's Active Transportation COI, Liz Kaster, to learn more about plans related to bus services, trails, walkways, and roadways for the East

Thea Foss. She referred to the Tacoma to Puyallup Regional Trail Connection project. Currently, the Active Transportation COI along with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, other local governments, and community partners are conducting a route analysis for three potential routes. There is potential for the route to cross the East Thea Foss on its way to Tacoma's waterfront.

## PROPOSED ROUTES FOR THE TACOMA TO PUYALLUP REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTION



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## CONCLUSION

According to our research, approximately 90% of lands of the East Thea Foss are owned by private entities. The East Thea Foss lacks public transportation services and public access sites that would appeal to the general public. Current road conditions are not ideal for developing a modern waterfront. The East Thea Foss is used for water-oriented, water dependent, and industrial purposes. In the future, it could provide variable light industrial and commercial uses, along with parks and trails open to the public. The key is to develop a vision and plan for the East Thea Foss that promotes increasing public access and diversifying land uses, while still ensuring that elements of a working port remain in place.

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