

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Hamilton Road’s existing physical conditions by describing an overview of the corridor, summarizing right-of-way characteristics, block form, and architectural treatment. This is followed by a condition assessment detailing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. An overview of land use patterns, zoning, and transportation is also provided.

The overall general patterns of development on the Hamilton Road corridor can be characterized as a “dispersed business district” that includes:

- Low development density;
- Lack of unifying architectural and landscape theme;
- High dependence on cars for access to businesses;
- Weak pedestrian improvements and quality of the public rights-of-way;
- Low coverage of building footprints covering only 25 percent of the lot area, with many properties exceeding two acres;
- Large separation between buildings;
- Unrestricted parking; and
- Poor location of buildings, which are setback from the roadway and separated by parking and service roads.

Some communities simply just let the patterns happen. They hope for the best and react to development/redevelopment proposals on an as needed basis. Other communities, like the City of Columbus, try to anticipate and influence change so that it fits into a logical scheme. This can be successfully done by adopting and implementing the Hamilton Road Corridor/Eastland Area Revitalization Plan. This type of plan allows the City to evaluate where it is today, determine what changes are desired for the future and articulate what actions are needed to shape that future. A sound comprehensive plan helps ensure that decisions made on development and capital improvements will maintain and enhance the corridor. Most importantly, the Plan will inspire residents, business leaders, area business and neighborhood associations, and City officials and staff to help the Hamilton Road corridor achieve its potential.

2.2 Corridor Environment

Commercial corridors like Hamilton Road have been the subject of development and planning debate for decades, yet the features that characterize these areas have not changed much over the years. Today's corridors, like yesterday's strip, drags and ribbon development areas, share a number of common components. Among the existing characteristics that characterize the Hamilton Road corridor are:

- Hamilton Road Right-of-Way
- Vehicular-oriented streetscape
- Numerous, closely spaced driveways
- Fragmented frontage service roads
- High accident intersections and circulation conflicts between the service roads and Hamilton Road
- No sidewalks and bikeways
- Minimal or no transit stop improvements

Block Patterns

- Rhythmic frontage block along Hamilton Road of approximately 800 feet
- Depth of frontage block ranging from 200 feet to 800 feet
- Frontage commercial development backing up to additional commercial, multiple family residential neighborhoods or open space
- Fragmented ownership within blocks
- Parking located in the front yard facing Hamilton Road

Architectural Form

- Pad sites with nationally branded commercial uses (e.g. Olive Garden, McDonalds, Red Lobster).
- Many single-story buildings
- Non-framing buildings with limited relationship to the corridor
- Nondescript or insignificant architectural character
- Linear or monotonous building form
- Poor sign treatment

Visually, the Hamilton Road corridor lacks a sense of organizational structure. The corridor contains many national fast food and sit down food franchises, gas stations, small free standing businesses, strip retail centers, and large format retail. The pattern of development makes the corridor indistinguishable from the next. There are opportunities to improve the corridor's cohesion and connectivity consistent with the high value the City

has bestowed on the creation of meaningful people places. Such improvements would create a “sense of place” and encourage visitors traveling through the study area to visit and spend time at the new high quality establishments on the corridor - rather than simply to pass through just another “commercial strip.”

2.3 Condition Assessment

A condition assessment identifies various existing elements of the Hamilton Road corridor that are of concern or interest with respect to planning and implementing the future of the area. It is important to build upon the assets and strengths of the corridor, while mitigating or eliminating the weaknesses and transforming into opportunities as noted below:

Assets/Strengths

- Serves as a primary arterial, with an average traffic volume of approximately 25,000 vehicles per day
- Is a high visibility for area businesses
- Displays a combination of convenience and shoppers goods
- Anchored by Eastland Mall, a regional shopping destination
- Contains Class A office/flex space at Lionmark Corporate Center
- Hosts a regional entertainment destination at the Fort Rapids Holiday Inn
- Features minimal property fragmentation with multiple opportunity sites

Challenges/Weaknesses

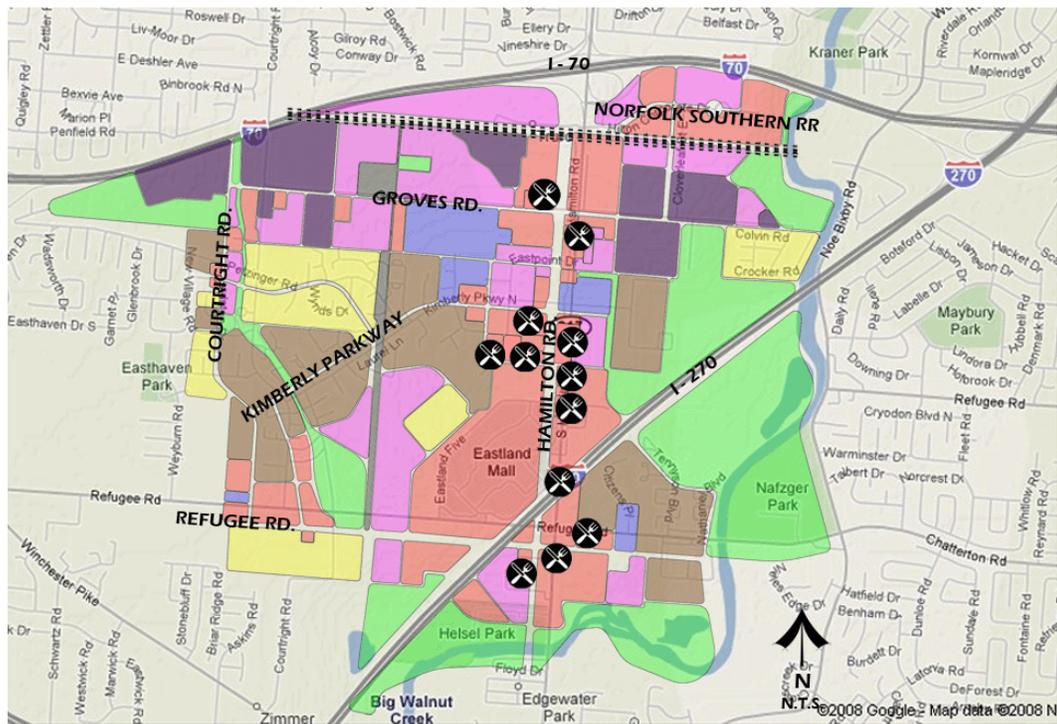
- High vacancy rates
- Deteriorating facades
- Clutter of overhead utilities/billboards/signs
- Poor pedestrian environment
- Overabundant surface parking highly visible from Hamilton Road
- Challenging circulation patterns from service roads which erode the customer ability to access businesses
- Lack of neighborhood park or facility for area residents

General Existing Land Use Patterns

A superficial first impression of the Hamilton Road corridor is that it is “more and more of the same”-beating out a steady rhythm of underutilized and/or vacant strip malls/centers, marginal retail uses, hospitality (hotels and sit-down restaurants), numerous fast food

restaurants and gas stations, self storage facilities, and previously owned vehicle sales. This is the image of the “stripped out strip.” But on closer examination, it is apparent that different sections of the road have different functions. There are neighborhood convenience retail establishments that attract customers both day and night, comparison shopping goods and services for both nearby residents and larger consumer groups, and office and warehouse/industrial uses that attract workers from an immediate market area as well as the greater Columbus region.

Map 2.1: Existing Land Use



 VACANT BUILDING AND/OR SITE	 INSTITUTION	 RESTAURANT/ENTERTAINMENT
 COMMERCIAL/ SERVICES/ OFFICE	 SINGLE FAMILY/ TWO FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	 RECREATION/ CONSERVATION
 INDUSTRIAL / WAREHOUSE	 MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	 UTILITY EASEMENT

Source: BBPC, Jacobs Carter Burgess

In addition to the frontage land uses, behind the commercial frontage are large areas of two-family and multiple family residential neighborhoods, offices, warehousing/light industrial uses, and environmentally sensitive open space and parks. This project area functions as a linear city with integrated neighborhoods and employment districts that are impacted by the corridor’s economic health, character and quality environment.

Approximately 775 acres of commercial, office and industrial/warehousing land is developed, planned or zoned within the project area, of which 36 percent (280 acres) is underutilized or vacant. This represents significant opportunities for redevelopment compatible with existing businesses and uses, responsive to community needs, and consistent with market forecasts and opportunities. In addition, many of the business along the corridor do not cater to a broad audience; therefore, stores and uses which meet the traditional convenience (e.g. groceries, drug stores) and shopping (e.g. apparel, electronics, home décor, books) are strongly desired.

Zoning

Zoning, the process regulating land uses and development activity, can precede development activity by many years and influence the valuation of land by increasing its economic potential. Zoning in the corridor and areas to the east and west represents a diverse mix of commercial, residential, office, industrial and warehousing districts. Zoning activity in the corridor has remained fairly static over the past several years due in part to economic conditions.

Transportation

Hamilton Road is an important north/south thoroughfare under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Department of Transportation and is designed as State Road 317. However, the City of Columbus retains jurisdiction as it is within the City limits and provides maintenance and operational services.

Hamilton Road extends from Dublin-Granville Road (north of the Port Columbus International Airport) southward through the project area and beyond past the north side of the Rickenbacker International Airport. Within the project area, Hamilton Road is a five-lane roadway, with two lanes in each direction and a dual center turn lane. Hamilton Road has been designed and functions well as a major artery. Signals are hard wired together to provide signal progression at a 45 mile per hour speed. In fact, Hamilton Road's effectiveness as an artery may have helped accelerate the decline of the retail and commercial uses along the road. Any roadway improvement plans for Hamilton Road and its service roads must consider how the road and frontage sites can be modified to provide economic stability of Hamilton Road businesses.

Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes along Hamilton Road vary, reaching 35,700 Average Daily Traffic (ADT) in 2003 between I-70 and Kimberly Parkway, reducing to 24,400 ADT between Kimberly Parkway and I-270. In 1996, the traffic volumes south of I-270 were 21,500 ADT. These are the most current counts available at this time. In reviewing historical traffic volume data for the corridor, traffic volumes have declined or remained the same since the mid 1990s. The Hamilton Road corridor does have adequate capacity to increase volumes upward of 40,000 to 45,000 ADT, which is high and would result in a decreased level of service. More recent traffic volumes, turning movement counts and Level of Service-LOS will be obtained by the traffic consultant currently working with the City to examine Hamilton Road and intersecting streets in this same project area.

Streets that intersect Hamilton Road also carry a fair amount of traffic: I-70 had volumes of 98,700 ADT in 2003; in 1995 Grove Road carried 10,900 ADT west of Hamilton Road and 6,500 ADT east of Hamilton Road. In 1995, Kimberly Parkway west of Hamilton Road saw traffic volumes of 10,100 ADT while east of Hamilton Road had a minor volume of 4,800 ADT. This section of Kimberly Parkway, also known as Kingsland Avenue, only provides direct access to an apartment complex. Refugee Road in 1995 saw volumes of 29,400 ADT west of Hamilton Road and 34,400 ADT east of Hamilton Road.

Even though there are relatively high traffic volumes, accident data does not indicate any significant trends. However, while Hamilton Road accident rate is lower than statewide urban averages, as traffic volumes increased northward along Hamilton Road, so did the total accidents. Furthermore, in the late 1990s -when volumes on the corridor were higher than they are currently - two intersections (Kimberly Parkway/Hamilton Road and Grove Road/Hamilton Road) were ranked in the top 20 intersections with the highest levels of accidents in the City. In 1997, at the Kimberly Parkway/Hamilton Road intersection, 79 percent of the accidents were at right angles occurring during the PM Peak (3-6 PM) and NOON Peak (11-1 PM). Also in 1987, the Grove Road/Hamilton Road intersection saw a high pattern of rear end collisions (approximately 55%) occurring primarily during the PM Peak (3-6 PM)¹.

¹ The Ohio Department of Transportation has identified the intersections of Hamilton Road and Kingsland Avenue/Kimberly Parkway and Hamilton Road and Grove Road as experiencing a high crash frequency; the intersections are under study for improvements.

Public Transit

The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) provides service to the Hamilton Road corridor along with service on Refugee Road, Kimberly Parkway and Courtright Road. COTA Route 89 runs along Hamilton Road extending from E Broad Street to south of US-33. Route 92 stretches from Eastland Mall to the Port Columbus International Airport along Refugee Road, Kimberly Parkway and Courtright Road and other streets northward to the Airport.

Despite the presence of public transit options, the lack of significant congestion along Hamilton Road makes automobile travel very convenient. Therefore, for those who have an automobile, public transportation is not an attractive alternative. The lack of shelters and other pedestrian conveniences is another problem that limits ridership.

