



# Urban Transportation Planner

## Job Description

Urban planners with a transportation focus identify community needs to develop solutions that most effectively use a community's land and infrastructure. They work with community stakeholders and analyze economic, environmental, and social trends that help in the development of, for example, planning new parks, sheltering the homeless, and making a region more attractive to businesses. Urban planners may specialize in areas including transportation planning or historic preservation.

## Salary

Entry — \$45,000  
Middle — \$75,000  
Top — \$110,000+

## Core Tasks

- Administer government plans or policies affecting land use
- Analyze and forecast human impacts
- Assess the feasibility of proposals and identify needed changes
- Conduct field investigations
- Meet with and present to public officials, developers, and the public

## Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**  
**Approx. 40 hours/week**  
(At key milestones overtime work may be required to meet deadlines)
- **Environment**  
Majority of time is spent in the **office** with some **site trips** to monitor project process and results
- **Travel**  
Occasional travel to **inspect proposed changes** and their impacts on land conditions and the environment

## Education / Prerequisites

### Education Level

Master's in an accredited urban/regional planning program or Bachelors in economics, geography, political science, or environmental design

### Licensing

Varies by state

### Pre-Job Preparation

Job shadowing and classes in environmental science, engineering, or public policy

## Experience

### Soft Skills

- Project Management
- Creativity
- Persuasion

### Technical Skills

- CAD/GIS
- Technical Writing
- Adobe Creative Suite



## Career Path: Brandon Gonzalez

### About Me

Senior Planning Associate at Alta Planning + Design

Bachelor's in Political Science from Texas Tech University 2006 / Master's in City and Regional Planning from University of Texas at Arlington 2009

### High School Life

"In high school, I had never heard of urban planning. I didn't realize that it was even a career that you could have. My career plan at the time was going to **law school** and into **politics** — I wanted to be on the political consulting side and help run campaigns."



### College Choices



"I got my **undergrad in political science** just thinking that was the pathway that I was going to go. After undergrad, I went to **law school**, and after a year of law school, I realized that law was **not something that I was truly passionate about**. During that period of my life, I'd also gotten a little burnt out on politics. I realized that maybe it wasn't something that I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

"When I was taking about three months off, I saw a billboard for a **master's degree in urban planning**. Within about a week I had a family member call and mention that they had heard about a career in urban planning. So, I started researching urban planning. I realized that this was something that I felt really strongly about. I had always been **fascinated with cities** and the dynamics of cities and their built environments. I was that person walking around taking pictures of roadways, buildings, and streets."

### Into the Real World

"When I earned my Master's in Urban Planning, I started working as a **land-use planner**. I worked on downtown plans and comprehensive plans and did a lot of public engagement for eight or nine years. After that I worked on development for about two years to understand the perspective from the other side — from the viewpoint of those that are implementing the plans that you're creating. I realized that development was great, but it wasn't where my heart was, so I went back to urban planning."

"When I moved to Seattle, I was recruited by **Alta**. Alta focuses on **active transportation**. Our work involves non-motorized movement and urban trails, for example, cycle tracks like Broadway Avenue and the Burke-Gilman Trail. First and foremost, the company is really committed to environmental stewardship. Like we say in our motto, **we create healthy, active communities**. I manage a group of planners, designers, and engineers here in Seattle."

## About My Job

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"You see the impact; It's an occupation for advocates"

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### Pros

- "You see the impact that it makes on quality of life in the community to have people outside using trails and biking and walking."
- "We are **making a difference**."
- "There's all of these **different dynamics** that go into the job and that's a lot of fun for me personally. There's all of this planning that happens beforehand, where we're reaching out to the neighborhoods, looking at how to fund the trail, and how we are going to get it built."
- "Urban planning in general is a very broad area that allows you to kind of **move around a bit within the field**."

### Fieldwork

- "During engagement, we stop at different places along trails we're working on and talk about the design considerations. We stop and just kind of **watch how people are using the trail** and **see if some of our design had actually worked**."
- "When you do get to work on other projects, in other parts of the country, you do have to **travel**."

### Cons

- "Regardless of your grand ideas and what it is that you would love to be able to do you have to **stick to a budget**."
- "It's a **challenge to try to get everybody on the same page**, and to try to get something moving forward."
- "You can work on the private side, which is consulting, and the unfortunate side of it is that when you work on the consulting side, it's a business. You have to **manage your projects really precisely** and consider time and budget constraints."

### Office Work

- "70% of our day is working **individually**."
- "Maybe 20% of your day is spent kind of on some of that **collaboration**, whether it's bringing in other people to help you brainstorm, or reaching out to experts in other offices."
- "10% of your time is spent **talking with clients**."

## Skills

- "Learning to **compromise** and get something built."
- "Illustrator, InDesign, and basically any of the **Adobe Creative Suite**."
- "**CAD** is nice to have. If you're going into more of the engineering side, it's a must."
- "**GIS** is a really important one. If you go the planning route, you will take a lot of classes in GIS. If you don't, then I would highly encourage you to learn about GIS."
- "**Communication** is extremely important because that's half your job."
- "**Patience**."

## Education/Experience

- "Generally speaking, most positions in urban planning look for a **master's degree in urban planning**. That's a pretty standard qualification. We're starting to see diversification a little bit in the qualifications though."
- "People come from a variety of backgrounds, including **geology, geography, engineering, political science, and psychology**."
- "Take some GIS tutorials so that in an interview you're able to say you have at least have a **fundamental understanding of GIS**, even if you're not an expert, because that's going to be critical."

## The Future of **Urban Transportation Planning**

"I don't think, historically, that active transportation or even urban planning was something that a lot of people thought a lot about. During the past 10–20 years though, and especially the past five to 10 years, **urban planning and active transportation has taken on a whole new kind of role in society**. Urban planning is at a critical shift and it's becoming more of an occupation for advocates."

"The profession transitioned to become a lot more **focused on people**, rather than on just the physical environment and building new roads and new residential subdivisions. It's really focused on resources, **creating inclusive communities**, and giving people options to not have to get in their car to drive from point A to point B. It's about understanding poverty trends and demographics, and where our historic development patterns contributed."

"Interesting challenges also come from **new forms of mobility**, such as E-Bikes. There are all of these different modes of transportation that people are starting to use that are pretty awesome, but we're also trying to figure out how we keep up with them. If you think about an E-Bike going 25 miles an hour versus a mechanical bike at 10 miles an hour, you have to think about what some of the issues are with that. Things are changing so quickly that it's tough for us to keep up with it, but that's a good thing. We're really **just at the beginning** of what's going to be a pretty exciting time for mobility."