

Ambitious plans for the reinvention of Colombia's Cali City will create distinct public transport-linked districts designed to stimulate different areas of the economy, while leaving space for future urban evolution

Calibrating the city of the future

The regeneration of Cali City in Colombia is one of the most ambitious transport-oriented developments under way globally and has been shortlisted for a World Architecture Festival award.

Over the next 12 years the 56,400ha city will be overhauled to incorporate separate districts oriented around transport links and cycle routes that blend with Cali's natural setting. The project's rationale partly stems from a requirement to reinvigorate the city's economy as well as smooth its mobility.

The vision behind Cali City's masterplan is "to create a competitive city for the region of the Cauca Valley and Colombia and a world-class destination that puts Cali on the map", says Natalia Uribe, senior associate director at Benoy, the project's design leader.

Attention has turned to reconfiguring Cali's existing footprint, as the expanding city, sandwiched between the west Andes Cord, the Cauca River to the east and two cities to the north and the south, looked set to run out of space.

"The big question when we began the process was what should Cali be? A city of services? A tourist city? We soon realised Cali has reinvented itself many times and the masterplan should allow room for it to continue to evolve and adapt as necessary to overcome any future challenges," she says.

At the design's core is a clutch of specialised centres of activity that will instil the city with clear direction: the traditional

Town Centre will be expanded to encompass two new zones: the Financial, Business and Services region, and the Culture District, creating an extended Global Centre, regenerating the old town and refurbishing buildings around a military airport in the middle of the city.

There will also be an Education District, which will bring together the current schools and universities; a Sports District, which will encompass the existing stadiums and sports facilities; and an Entertainment and Fashion District.

These will be sustained by four 'hubs': a multi-modal transport hub to support cultural and financial services activities; a health and wellbeing hub linked to the Sports and Education Districts; a hospitality hub, connected to the Town Centre and Fashion Districts, which will cater to tourists; and a technological hub, linked to the Education District. This diversity of offering "gives Cali the potential to raise up the economy through different areas", Uribe says.

Each district is linked to a station on the main MIO public transport system and the districts are positioned across the valley to avoid concentration of economic activities in one place. The current economic focus is the town centre, which is set to be expanded.

Stacking the financial sector on top of the Aguas Claras MIO Station will allow the area to assume more of a traditional town centre role. "If we can encourage people to work and



live around public transport areas it will stop chaotic mobility around the city," says Uribe.

A fundamental part of the masterplan's approach pays thought to townscape and quality of environment. Particular design detail has gone into the north-west side of the city, where a further three zones will bring to life the vision for Cali.

San Pascual, a mixed-use retail, leisure and residential scheme at the heart of the Global Centre, is the subject of plans for a



Cali City's masterplan envisages the creation of several specialised centres of activity oriented around transport links and green space, with San Pascual, a retail, leisure and residential scheme at the heart of a new Global Centre, set to kick off regeneration of the old town



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Natalia Uribe, senior associate director, Benoy

cycle network and pedestrian routes through parks and tree-lined avenues, while 6th Avenue in the entertainment district, which aims to revitalise Cali's former premium fashion quarter, includes proposals for some car-free areas, featuring residential towers and a restoration of the commercial boulevard popular in the 1960s and 70s. The Hoyo Piloto project in The Town Centre district will comprise a new waterfront development around the Cali River.

"These zones, designed from a pedestrian point of view, create a street network that allows a blend of urban encounters to occur – grand, everyday, intimate – infusing the place with character," Uribe says.

Also under consideration is a regional park on the site of the military airport in the centre of Cali.

Another strand of the masterplan is a strategy dubbed 'GII', connecting Cali's major nearby towns and suburbs and

improving movement to Cali.

"Any development of a city centre would not be complete without a holistic look at the wider region, linking the urban environment with its greener neighbours that feed the city with produce, talent and wealth," says Uribe.

An additional impetus is the provision of a direct route to South America's second largest port, Buenaventura.

The scale of Cali City's essential but complex transformation means that it will unfold in stages over several years and is likely to start next year with the San Pascual development. The masterplan will create an environment that optimises urban living, underpinned by public transport, while embracing the city's natural attributes.

Of all its creative solutions the most innovative is the flexibility it provides in allowing the city to grow and change as required, as a means of future-proofing Cali's economic engine.