

# **2006 Thurston Passenger Rail Workgroup Findings**

**A Report to the  
Thurston Regional  
Planning Council**

August 2006



**Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end.  
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.**

Winston Churchill

A dedicated group of policy makers, community representatives, and staff from local, regional and state agencies partnered to discover and explain opportunities for increased passenger rail travel in the Thurston Region. Their findings lay the groundwork for a reasoned and timely exploration of a high capacity transportation system to serve the mobility needs of Thurston County's burgeoning populace. The Regional Council, Policy Board and staff offer their thanks and appreciation to the **Passenger Rail Workgroup** members.

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<b>Kirk Fredrickson</b>	Washington State Department of Transportation
<b>Loren Herrigstad</b>	Washington Association of Rail Passengers
<b>Marty Minkoff</b>	Sound Transit
<b>Jennifer Ryan</b>	Puget Sound Regional Council
<b>Paul Telford</b>	Port of Olympia

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<b>Lon Wyrick</b>	Executive Director, TRPC
<b>Dennis Bloom</b>	Intercity Transit
<b>Jailyn Brown</b>	TRPC
<b>Karen Parkhurst</b>	TRPC
<b>Bhanu Yerra</b>	TRPC

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TRPC's mission is to **"Provide Visionary Leadership on Regional Plans, Policies, and Issues."** The primary functions of TRPC are to develop regional plans and policies for **transportation** [as the federally recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and state recognized Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO)], **growth management, environmental quality**, and other topics determined by the Council; provide **data and analysis to support local and regional decision making**; act as a **"convener"** to build **community consensus** on regional issues through information and citizen involvement; build **intergovernmental consensus** on regional plans, policies, and issues, and advocate local implementation; and provide **planning, historic preservation, and technical services** on a contractual basis.

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## Assignment

In the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) identifies passenger rail and public transportation as a work program priority area. The RTP directs development of the role passenger rail will play in the region's transportation system, moving toward a preferred rail strategy in the context of the region's mass transit future.

In 2005, TRPC's Chair appointed a Passenger Rail Workgroup of TRPC and Transportation Policy Board (TPB) policy makers. The Workgroup invited additional associate members with expertise in various facets of rail systems and services.

Their charge is to understand the rail system and its operations in order to conduct an analysis of passenger rail options available to the region, as a basis for crafting a regional vision for a high capacity transportation system. The guidance provided by the Workgroup will help TRPC sharpen its focus and support development of the Council's regional rail plan. Intended work products include:

- A report to TRPC on the range of rail opportunities, highlighting those that seem the most promising for future TRPC consideration.
- A primer on passenger rail transit.
- A synopsis of past and present rail planning documents.
- A commuter rail ridership study.

## Summary of Key Findings

The Passenger Rail Workgroup concluded that the Thurston Region would benefit from a short-range planning emphasis on commuter services (connecting Thurston region workers with major job centers in greater Puget Sound) and a long-range planning emphasis on intra-urban services (mobility in the urban core), with continued support for the State's intercity passenger rail investments. To that end, they developed draft policy language in support of each area for TRPC to consider (see pages 7, 9, and 12). Additionally, the Workgroup encourages TRPC to pursue three items as next steps:

1. Encourage Sound Transit to include the DuPont rail station in its Sound Transit 2 investment plan.
2. Scope and fund a regional high capacity transportation study with state and federal legislative support.

**Commuter Rail** provides urban passenger train service between suburban nodes and one or two stops in a central business district. It operates –

- during the peak commute periods when the vast majority of workers travel to and from work
- serving the peak directional flows.

In the Thurston Region this means northbound service to Tacoma and Seattle during the morning rush hour and southbound in the evening.

**Light Rail** operates within an urban area providing local transit services among many stops serving the metropolitan hub. It is all-day service used for a variety of reasons – such as going to school, commuting, shopping and traveling to leisure and recreation venues.

3. Advocate for continued implementation and financial support by the State for its intercity passenger rail plan.

## **Process Overview**

The Passenger Rail Workgroup met from October 2005 through August 2006. In initial meetings, members devoted time to becoming familiar with the regional rail system, its operators and services. Then the types of passenger rail services provided in the Pacific Northwest and in other regions of the United States were reviewed. Finally, the Workgroup discussed potential rail services for the Thurston region and crafted draft policy statements to support the most promising opportunities available to the region – focusing on light rail within the community, commuter rail to connect the Thurston Region to job centers in central Puget Sound during peak periods, and intercity rail to provide all day service to Seattle, Portland and other cities on the I-5 corridor.

In developing their draft policy statements, the Workgroup, while supporting development of passenger rail, recognized the need to examine alternative forms of transportation that could serve similar functions to light rail and commuter rail. As a result, they broadened their suggested policy statements to include consideration of transit alternatives to fill the transportation niches of intra-urban service (mobility in the urban core) and commuter services (connecting Thurston region workers with major job centers in greater Puget Sound).

The Workgroup also considered Sound Transit's developing voter proposal for expansion and improvement of its system. Of particular interest was the potential for a Sounder commuter rail station in DuPont. While the Workgroup was meeting, the Sound Transit board was working on the draft list of candidate projects to include in Sound Transit 2, its package of projects for voter consideration in the November, 2007 election.

## **Synopsis of Work**

### Overview

The Workgroup began with a discussion of interests and desired outcomes. Some themes included:

- Developing a mature public transportation system for our region, integrating rail services, over the long term.
- Using rail as an economic development and land use tool.
- Fostering an ongoing discussion of passenger rail in the community to create an environment for informed public discussion.
- Creating a vision that is practical, doable, and sustainable.

Some of the desirable qualities noted in other rail systems included cleanliness, safety, on-time delivery, ease of use, reliability, advanced use of technology, barrier-free fare collection, and a wide range of amenities at urban train stations.

## Existing System

The Passenger Rail Workgroup then embarked on a review of the existing rail system and service providers. The map in Appendix A provides an overview of the rail system. To gain a more complete understanding of how the rail system works, the planning basin for the rail map extends to include the Ports of Tacoma, Olympia, Grays Harbor and Centralia/Chehalis. This provides a more comprehensive view of the system affecting the Thurston Region. For reference, the Workgroup also received a Glossary (Appendix B), Passenger Rail Primer (Appendix C), and Summary of Route and Infrastructure Information (Appendix D).

The mainline – the primary north/south freight rail line, owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), bisects Thurston County on its way from Vancouver, Washington to Vancouver, British Columbia. Up to 60 trains per day frequent the section running through Thurston County. The corridor primarily serves freight, but also supports intercity passenger rail service via the Amtrak Cascades and Coast Starlight. The Amtrak trains stop at Centennial Station, located just outside Lacey’s urban growth boundary on the Yelm Highway. The mainline is projected to carry up to 120 trains per day by 2025.

Two lines branch from the mainline to provide freight rail services in Thurston County. The St. Clair Branch (owned by BNSF, operated by Tacoma Rail) travels to the Union Mills Road area just outside Lacey, with the alignment continuing on as the Woodland Trail. The East Olympia Branch (owned by Union Pacific, operated by Tacoma Rail) leaves the mainline near Rich Road and 83<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SW, providing access to the Port of Olympia (owned by the Port, operated by Tri-City and Olympia Railroad) and the Mottman Industrial area (owned by BNSF, operated by Tacoma Rail).

Tacoma Rail owns and operates their Mountain Division with a branch running through south Thurston County, connecting Fredrickson to Chehalis. The line supports infrequent freight rail use in Thurston County.

The City of Yelm also owns a portion of rail line, the Yelm Prairie Line, connecting to the BNSF Prairie Line serving Ft. Lewis and then to Sound Transit’s Lakeview Subdivision. The Lakeview Subdivision (also known as the Pt. Defiance Bypass) is a branch from the mainline, diverging just north of the Thurston County boundary and connecting in Tacoma at Freighthouse Square. This line is designated as part of the state’s high speed corridor to carry passenger rail service, bypassing a key point of congestion on the mainline.

Rail America’s Puget Sound and Pacific Line connects Grays Harbor and Bremerton to Centralia, passing through the southwest portion of Thurston County in the Grand Mound/Rochester area.

## Rail Providers

To supplement their review of how the region’s rail system functions, the Workgroup also heard from representatives of Sound Transit and Tacoma Rail about their systems, services and experiences. In particular, Marty Minkoff, Sound Transit’s Director of Sounder Commuter Rail,

shared some lessons learned in their experience in planning and implementing the Sounder system:

- Everything costs more and takes longer than anticipated.
- Political support is key to working with the large, privately-owned railroads.
- Identify risks early and how to manage them.
- Public parking at rail stations is a continuing challenge.

Mr. Minkoff also explained some issues to consider if a Thurston commuter rail service were to connect to or be provided by Sound Transit. The Workgroup was briefed periodically by Chair Sackrisson on the evolving consideration of a DuPont rail station in the developing package of projects for voter consideration in November 2007.

### Existing Plans

The Workgroup also reviewed the findings from several regional and state rail planning documents directing past and current investments. Synopses of these plans are included in Appendix G. The Workgroup focused their discussion on some of the challenges in rail planning, such as

- access and logistics issues for providing public transportation on a private facility
- funding issues
- the very long range of some plans
- the variety of interests involved in the process
- growing freight train volumes on the mainline
- the impact of deferred maintenance.

### Light Rail

As background to their discussion on light rail, the Workgroup received the light rail reference information included in Appendix F. They also developed maps of current and projected land use with respect to major corridors in the region. These maps will be useful in designing an intra-urban high capacity public transit system. Such a system was recognized as an important component in implementing transportation and land use visions over the long term. The Workgroup discussed the need for close coordination of land use and transportation planning among local and regional jurisdictions to preserve key corridors. While the Workgroup supports development of an urban light rail system, they also stressed the need to look at the full range of alternatives (a requirement to garner federal and state support for any option), not unduly favoring one service option over another. Such a system should also strategically connect activity and transportation hubs.

### Commuter Rail

In their discussion of commuter rail opportunities, the Workgroup considered the draft findings of a commuter rail ridership estimate, building on the results of an ongoing study of the region's commuters (both to be published under separate cover from this report). The commuter rail ridership estimate was based on a sketch planning approach used for the North Sound Regional

Rail Study (2005) that investigates commuter rail from Bellingham to Everett, with connecting Sound Transit service to Seattle.

The Thurston study examines five routes, some with two or three station configurations, with each route connecting to Sound Transit's Sounder commuter rail service in Pierce County. Future ridership ranged up to approximately 900 riders (a.m. period), depending on the stations included in the scenarios. The highest figures involve Centennial Station and hypothetical stations in Olympia and Lacey. This study only provides a sketch planning estimate and more rigorous transportation modeling would be needed to evaluate the options. Nor does it address other modal options.

Additionally, commuter rail reference information (Appendix E) was provided to the Workgroup. Similar to the light rail discussion, the Workgroup supports development of commuter rail service for the region, but agreed that policy makers should evaluate the full range of options available to support the growing population of residents living in Thurston County and working in central Puget Sound. Some objectives included preserving our region's options, exploring mode and service alternatives, and further assessing the commuter rail ridership estimate. Such an evaluation would support a public discussion of options and investments. The Workgroup also stressed the need to involve our state and federal representatives in support of the study.

### Intercity Rail

Another key element of the region's passenger rail system is the all-day intercity service provided by Amtrak. It will continue to serve our community's business and recreation travel needs along the I-5 corridor during off-peak travel times. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), in partnership with Amtrak, continues to increase the number of round trips, eventually planned to reach 13 daily trains in each direction between Eugene, Oregon and Vancouver, British Columbia. Washington State is also making significant investments in the rail system, allowing better passenger rail service while maintaining freight rail capacity. Of special interest to the Thurston Region are State's investments in crossovers, adding a third main track, and upgrading the Lakewood Subdivision – all to handle faster, more reliable passenger rail service. The Workgroup stressed the need for the State to continue these investments. They would also like to encourage WSDOT to consider incentives to build ridership in the region and scheduling options that could provide more timely peak period service between Olympia and both Seattle and Portland.

The result of the Workgroup's labors includes proposed policy statements for commuter and intra-regional high capacity transit services, and a list of proposed action items in support of those policies. These findings are discussed in the next section.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### Regional Rail System

The Workgroup recognizes the importance and value of the regional rail network. Through extensive preservation efforts during the 1980s and 1990s, many important pieces of the rail

system were saved from abandonment, and are now slated for use as trails or future rail. With the recovery and resurgence in rail transportation, the Workgroup stressed the importance of preserving rail capacity for future rail use to the extent it is logical and practicable. This network will serve both freight and passenger rail services.

The Workgroup also acknowledged WSDOT's work to establish and expand regular Amtrak Cascades intercity rail service from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, British Columbia, with frequent and expanding service at Centennial Station. It was also noted that the location of Centennial Station in a limited access area and outside the urban area poses challenges for commuter rail service, and that current Amtrak schedule is not conducive to business day-trip travel to Seattle or Portland.

A different set of challenges face policy makers and planners in trying to provide direct rail service to the urban core, where former rail rights-of-way have been converted to trails. As Sound Transit planning staff pointed out, however, it may be easier and much less costly to establish new rights-of-way now than to try to retrofit a more densely developed urban core in the future.

Growing traffic on the BNSF mainline also presents a challenge. WSDOT plans to add a third rail line and other improvements that benefit the safety and reliability of public train service, and opens capacity for more freight movement. Traffic is expected to grow significantly over the next two decades, further impacting local communities. For example, waiting trains often block the primary entrance to Bucoda along SR 507. In addition to causing delays for travelers, the blockages can impact emergency services access to the area. Concerns such as these will be addressed as part of the region's rail plan development.

The Workgroup narrowed its focus to the passenger rail services that would most impact the development of the region:

- Commuter rail serving residents who live in Thurston County but work in central Puget Sound,
- Light rail serving transportation needs and helping to shape land use along the main transportation corridors connecting Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater, and
- Intercity rail serving business and leisure travel along the I-5 corridor.

### Commuter Rail

The Workgroup found that the potential for commuter rail may exist in the region in the next one to two decades. Since significant lead time is required to establish a new commuter service, the planning process needs to begin now. Initial findings from the commuter study showed strong commute patterns linking the Thurston Region to central Puget Sound and potentially strong ridership in future years. Workgroup members' observations of other commuter rail services in the U.S. and abroad showed the value of reliable transportation service in growing metropolises.

The Workgroup also concluded that trying to plan for the future, rather than retrofit a highly developed urban structure, makes good policy and fiscal sense. Any analysis, however, should

comprehensively consider the full range of options for improving commuter transportation and not presuppose that commuter rail is the preferred alternative.

A draft policy was developed for consideration by TRPC.

## **Commuter High Capacity Transportation**

**Goal: Improve commuter services linking the Thurston Region with central Puget Sound.**

### **Policies:**

- A. Focus on bi-directional peak period service connecting the Thurston Region (Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and Yelm) with the urban work centers in central Puget Sound.
- B. Improve connections between rural areas in Thurston and neighboring counties to commuter transportation hubs in urban Thurston County.
- C. Any assessment for improving commuter transportation should include a comparison of expanded express bus service, commuter rail, ferries, additional freeway and/or high-occupancy-vehicle lanes, park-and-rides, and other appropriate options, evaluating costs, benefits and community effects. It should also recognize the need for an efficient and supporting bus system, as well as any other elements of a planned or existing intra-urban transportation system, in implementation of any alternative.

### **Action Items**

- A. Initiate a high capacity transportation study to evaluate more closely and comprehensively the alternatives for supporting commuter transportation needs. Address intra-urban high capacity transportation needs in such a study, including the links needed between a local and commuter system. Include the role of intercity rail in the assessment, identifying gaps or issues.
- B. In the near term, collaborate with Intercity Transit, Sound Transit, and Pierce Transit to assess service expansion, coordination and support for express inter-county and feeder transit routes.
- C. Assess commuter transit needs of south Thurston, Lewis, Grays Harbor and Mason Counties, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

- D. Expand interagency coordination among local and regional agency staff to ensure high capacity transportation planning is included in land use and transportation planning processes. Initiate a high capacity public transportation corridor discussion for local and regional policy makers and transportation and land use staff to coordinate plans and policies amongst all the affected jurisdictions.
- E. Encourage local policy makers to consider and protect future commuter transportation system needs and corridors in their local comprehensive and transportation plans.

### **Considerations**

- Centennial Station has challenges as a sole commuter rail hub. It is located outside Lacey's urban growth boundary on Yelm Highway. Unlike other rail stations, it is located away from the urban center with a limited grid of surrounding roadways providing access.
- Expansion of express inter-county bus service may be a more feasible option than rail in the short term, using existing resources, partnerships and infrastructure, with access to an existing funding mechanism.
- Express inter-county bus transit service would be necessary in all scenarios.
- I-5 capacity is limited. The State's plans do not call for widening I-5 to add more general purpose or HOV lanes in the Lacey/Olympia/Tumwater urban area.
- All options include infrastructure improvements, such as park-and rides, rail or bus transit stations, dedicated rights-of-way, and other improvements supporting intermodal connectivity.
- It may be challenging to establish new passenger rail service on tracks privately owned by the major railroads, whose primary business is moving freight.
- Many regional rail corridors have been converted into trail systems, limiting access to the urban core. While preservation of these corridors kept them available for public use, many times this became a recreational use and did not maintain the underlying economic use of the transportation corridor. It is essential for future preservation efforts to consider options, such as co-use (trail and rail), in order to maintain the economic benefits of the rail corridor even though it may have recreational uses.

### Light Rail

The Workgroup was intrigued by the potential light rail presented to serve the community in the future. However, members were unsure if the region had enough density and financial capacity in the near term to support development of a light rail system. The Workgroup also questioned the technical limitations that may be inherent in a community with such steep topography linking major commercial centers.

Like commuter rail, the Workgroup, while supporting the light rail concept, also stressed the importance of investigating a full range of options to provide intra-urban service. The Workgroup encourages TRPC to include an assessment of intra-urban service in a comprehensive high capacity transportation plan. The objective is to provide a comprehensive

blueprint of a coordinated transportation system, integrated with comprehensive land use planning and economic development efforts.

The following draft policy was crafted for consideration by TRPC.

## **Intra-Urban High Capacity Public Transportation**

**Goal: Improve intra-urban frequent public transportation options in the region's urban core.**

### **Policies:**

- A. Successful intra-urban service requires close coordination of land use and transportation planning among local and regional jurisdictions in order to preserve high capacity public transportation corridors.
- B. Any assessment of proposed high capacity transportation services should include a comparison of light rail, expanded bus transit service, bus rapid transit, and other appropriate technologies, evaluating costs, benefits and community effects. It should also recognize the need for an efficient and supportive bus transit system in implementation of any alternative.
- C. A high capacity public transportation system must connect major work, home and shopping activity hubs, and major transportation hubs along strategic corridors.

### **Action Items**

- A. Closely evaluate examples of light rail, bus rapid transit and other frequent transit service models, including those established in the Pacific Northwest.
- B. Use existing data sources to monitor and report on indicators tracking intra-urban transportation service conditions and needs. Select a fixed set of baseline indicators to facilitate data comparisons over time. Establish the unique and common indicators for various alternatives that may be selected, including light rail, bus rapid transit, and frequent local bus transit service. Update and report regularly to TRPC, TPB and other interested agencies.
- C. Understand and monitor high capacity transportation funding sources and highlight opportunities to TRPC and TPB.
- D. Expand interagency coordination among local and regional agency staff to ensure high capacity transportation planning is included in land use and transportation planning processes. Initiate a high capacity public transportation corridor discussion for local and

regional policy makers, and transportation and land use staff to coordinate plans and policies amongst all the affected jurisdictions.

- E. Raise awareness of policy makers, staff and the public of changing intra-urban transportation opportunities and the conditions that support them.
- F. Encourage local policy makers to consider and protect future high capacity transportation corridors in their current land use deliberations.

## **Considerations**

- Do not limit potential high capacity transportation corridors to existing street rights-of-way.
- All options will require infrastructure improvements such as park-and-rides, rail or bus stations, dedicated rights-of-way, and other improvements supporting intermodal connectivity.
- Many regional rail corridors have been converted into trail systems, limiting access to the urban core. While preservation of these corridors kept them available for public use, many times this became a recreational use and did not maintain the underlying economic use of the transportation corridor. It is essential for future preservation efforts to consider options, such as co-use (trail and rail), in order to maintain the economic benefits of the rail corridor even though it may have recreational uses.
- Ensure indicators are useful and manageable, using existing data, limited in number, relevant, easy to understand, comparable over time and consistent with how transportation and land use are measured already. In selecting indicators, consider their use as future performance measures.
- Report to TRPC, TPB and other interested agencies frequently enough to keep policy makers abreast of conditions, yet keep the level of effort manageable.
- Continue focus on connections with existing transportation options. For example, coordinate urban high capacity public transportation with opportunities for rural and Tribal service connections.
- Consider economic development opportunities supported by frequent intra-urban transportation services.

## **Intercity Rail**

The Workgroup recognized the important and continuing role intercity passenger rail service will play in our region. This all-day service meets the needs of business and recreational travelers, not otherwise filled by commuter rail, light rail, or other similar transit services. WSDOT teamed with Amtrak to provide intercity passenger rail service from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, British Columbia. The State continues its investments in rail lines, equipment and service with the aim of increasing both frequency and reliability, while decreasing travel times.

A challenge unique to this region's intercity passenger rail is the location of Centennial Station – the only Amtrak Cascades stop located outside an urban or business center. While the station facilities were greatly improved with the move to its present location, the trip from the station

to/from the region's tri-city urban hub can only be made by bus, taxi or other arranged transportation. Further, no amenities (shops, restaurants, and services) are available near the depot. The station also sits just outside Lacey's urban growth area, limiting opportunities for transit-oriented development (the station is bordered to the west by suburban residential developments). Intercity Transit provides bus service (Route 64) every 30 to 60 minutes, but rail delays can make timely multi-modal transfers problematic.

The Amtrak service fills an important need in providing a full range of transportation services in the region. Its four daily round trips provide midday and evening service to the Thurston region, and WSDOT plans to significantly increase service in the coming years. Schedules, however, are primarily driven by larger markets, such as Portland and Seattle, so local travelers may not find this service as convenient as they would like, particularly for business day trips.

WSDOT's plans to add a third rail line and increase the frequency and speed of passenger rail trains will also have an impact on the region's land use, as will the increasing use of the mainline rail system for freight. One community, Bucoda, may particularly feel the impacts as the rail line passes between the community and its main access route, SR 507. The town itself is built close to the tracks, so adding another 'lane' may have some significant consequences. The town and other communities in Thurston County are already impacted by 'parked' trains which block road crossings while waiting their turn to move. Identifying rail/road/pedestrian access and safety issues, then addressing those issues with BNSF, WSDOT, Amtrak, and other rail service providers, will be an important outcome of the region's rail planning efforts.

The Workgroup would like the region to work together with WSDOT and Amtrak to explore opportunities to develop schedules more conducive for traveling to/from Olympia and provide incentives to induce more rail travel to/from our region. A regional marketing plan may help improve the use of this resource. The High Capacity Transportation Study should also address the role intercity passenger rail plays in the mix of the region's transit services.

With or without commuter and light rail, WSDOT/Amtrak intercity passenger rail service will continue to be an important component of the Thurston region's transportation system. It provides another travel choice for our residents, workers and visitors.

The Workgroup would like TRPC to consider the following policy direction.

# Intercity Passenger Rail Service

**Goal: Continue expansion of the WSDOT/Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service in the Thurston Region.**

## **Policies:**

- A. Support continued State investments in providing more frequent, faster and more reliable intercity passenger rail service along the I-5 corridor, which includes service to the Thurston Region.
- B. Improve connections between Centennial Station and the region's urban hubs.
- C. Consider the role and impact of intercity passenger rail service in the High Capacity Transportation Study.

## **Action Items**

- A. Actively endorse with federal, state and local policy makers and agency leaders implementation of the State's plan to continue and expand the Cascades intercity passenger rail service.
- B. Work with WSDOT and Amtrak to explore options for improving local schedules, and providing incentives for increased travel to/from the region.
- C. Identify issues related to the expansion of the mainline to support passenger rail that impact the region's communities. Work with WSDOT, Amtrak and BNSF to address these in their design, construction and operation of the additional rail capacity.
- D. Working with WSDOT, Intercity Transit, and other appropriate interests, develop a marketing strategy to promote increased intercity rail travel to the region.
- E. Explore land use issues related to Centennial Station and develop a list of potential actions to address them.

## **Considerations**

- Centennial Station is the only depot served by the Amtrak Cascades service that lies outside an urban center or central business district.
- The Cascades schedule is driven by service to larger markets in Portland and Seattle.
- Mainline operations already have substantial impacts on road access to some Thurston communities, and expanded capacity may create additional impacts.
- Whether or not the region pursues commuter and/or light rail systems, intercity passenger rail will continue to be an important component in the mix of public transportation services available to Thurston residents, workers and visitors.

## Next Steps

### **1. Encourage Sound Transit to include the DuPont rail station in their Sound Transit 2 investment package for voter consideration in November 2007.**

Sound Transit is in the process of developing its second investment proposal (Sound Transit 2) for voter consideration within their service district (including large urbanized parts of Pierce, King and Snohomish Counties). Their Board has been evaluating a number of candidate projects as potential investments, ranging from commuter rail, light rail and express bus transit service to transit centers, high-occupancy-vehicle access lanes and park-and-ride lots.

As part of their first investment plan, Sound Transit purchased the Lakewood Subdivision to extend commuter rail service beyond downtown Tacoma to South Tacoma and Lakewood, where they currently provide extensive express bus transit service. The Lakewood Subdivision line continues through DuPont (at the existing Sound Transit park-and-ride lot), reconnecting with the BNSF mainline just north of the Nisqually River and Thurston County border. The Lakewood Subdivision will be further improved by WSDOT as part of developing a high speed corridor for routing all public train service, including Amtrak service and any potential commuter rail service out of Thurston County.

One of the candidate projects being considered for Sound Transit 2 is development of a commuter rail station in DuPont. Extending commuter rail service to DuPont helps Pierce County residents and provides a close potential link for commuter rail service from Thurston County. It further fuels the discussion of transportation alternatives to address the region's growing share of residents who commute from Thurston County to King and Pierce Counties for work.

At the time this report was being developed, Sound Transit recently released a set of three draft investment options to gauge public support. Ranging from \$6 to \$11 billion, none of the optional investment packages includes the DuPont rail station in its project list. Eliminating the DuPont project from the preferred investment package precludes development for more than a decade. However, the project could be included as an option, contingent on TRPC taking the lead in analyzing future service needs and launching the planning process to assess the region's high capacity transportation system needs and relationship to Sound Transit's system.

The Workgroup encourages TRPC to continue working with Sound Transit, urging them to keep the DuPont commuter rail station option open over the next decade.

### **2. Scope and fund a regional high capacity transportation study to investigate and evaluate the range of options available to accommodate the region's projected growth. Seek state and federal support. Consider the full range of road, rail and water options, including but not limited to commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit, expanded express bus transit service, ferries, additional freeway and/or high-occupancy-vehicle capacity, and park-and-rides. Address existing and planned intercity passenger rail in the analysis.**

From the Workgroup’s discussion of light rail and commuter rail emerged a clear necessity to further investigate rail options, as well as other transit opportunities to assess what choices would best meet the needs of the region. The brisk growth forecast for the Thurston region and Washington State made it clear the time to start planning is now.

Furthermore, while the Workgroup supports the concept of developing commuter and light rail in the region, the planning efforts should address the full range of options. This will best prepare the region for a meaningful public discussion and best qualify the selected outcome for federal and state legislative and financial support. Beginning now preserves the widest range of options and encourages close coordination of local and regional land use and transportation planning. It allows the most flexibility to use transportation investments in support of community and economic development. Such a study would also evaluate the cost and ramifications of a ‘do nothing’ scenario.

Major capital investments take many years – even a decade or longer – to get on the ground and the costs keep drastically rising. By starting to plan now, the Thurston Region will get a head start in addressing the looming congestion issues of the future.

Initially, the Workgroup was considering development of “triggers” that would initiate such a planning process. But in their deliberations, the Workgroup realized many triggers have already been tripped. The Workgroup believes analysis and deliberation is required now to prepare for the changes and opportunities facing the Thurston Region in the next two decades.

- 3. Advocate for continued implementation and financial support by the State for its intercity passenger rail plan. Explore opportunities for increased service to better meet the Thurston Region’s schedule needs. Identify and address the land use impacts associated with additional capital or operational improvements.**

Intercity passenger rail plays an important role in the mix of the region’s transportation services. Expansion will bring opportunities the region should embrace and impacts to mitigate. By opening a continuing dialogue with WSDOT, Amtrak, BNSF and policy makers, the region can explore opportunities to better use this resource, while balancing the needs of communities and neighborhoods significantly impacted by mainline operations.