

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Purpose

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) serves as a strategic blueprint for the region's transportation system to the year 2045. Regional planning "makes sense," and policy makers would engage in the process even absent state and federal requirements. A continuous, collaborative, and coordinated planning approach addresses the needs of the entire region. Beyond a simple statement of purpose, the RTP serves many functions –

- Implements transportation elements of Creating Places, Preserving Spaces – A Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region (Sustainable Thurston Plan).
- Supports local, county, state, and tribal governments' efforts to create and maintain livable communities throughout the region.
- Promotes movement of people, goods, and services in ways that minimize social, fiscal, and environmental costs and impacts.
- Emphasizes taking care of the existing system through safety, maintenance, and preservation programs.
- Embodies the philosophy that land use and transportation are inextricably linked and must be managed cooperatively to meet both land use goals and transportation needs.
- Recognizes that the rural and resource lands, walkable neighborhoods, city/town centers, urban corridors, and vital and diverse economies called for in local and tribal plans require a supportive transportation system.
- Seeks to improve the efficiency of the transportation system through a variety of means, such as using new road-building materials, trip reduction strategies, transportation technology, and alternative fuels.
- Acknowledges the diversity of need in the region and identifies strategies to improve mobility for all people – regardless of age, income, or ability.

- Meets fiscal constraints, with revenues identified in the RTP sufficient to fund the listed projects and maintain the existing system.
- Meets state and federal planning requirements and specific regulatory guidelines.
- Acknowledges that while the region has made progress since the last RTP, many challenges remain.

## Planning Timeline

Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) is required to update the long range transportation plan at least every four years (federal requirements) and review it biennially (state requirements). TRPC may make annual revisions to the plan to keep it current. These annual reviews typically include changes to the project list and limited changes to other parts of the plan. The RTP must look at least 20 years into the future. This includes projections for population, employment, transportation demand, and costs and revenues.

## Roles and Relationships

TRPC coordinates the RTP planning process with a variety of partners. At various stages in the process and at various levels of formality, the policies, plans, and projects of the many partners connect.

A high degree of communication and coordination is necessary to serve the region and each individual partner effectively. In some cases, the coordination is required, and in others, it's just logical. At the more formal level, state and federal laws mandate certain reporting relationships and consistencies. The RTP must be consistent with local comprehensive plans, which in turn must be consistent with the Washington State Transportation Plan, and all must fit within the federal and state policies and guidelines.

TRPC develops and maintains both the regional population and employment forecast, and the regional transportation model, which provide the basis for our region's shared planning assumptions. We work closely with local, state, tribal, and federal governments, special districts,

**Figure 1-1: Policies, Plans, and Projects Are Influenced By Local, Regional, State, Federal, and Tribal Partners**



## Figure 1-2: Federal and State Requirements for the RTP

| FEDERAL   | COMBINED  | STATE   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address 20+ year planning horizon</li> <li>• Include short- and long-range strategies</li> <li>• Review and update every 4 or 5 years, depending on air quality conformity status</li> <li>• Include performance measures</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address all modes of travel</li> <li>• Preserve existing system</li> <li>• Make efficient use of system</li> <li>• Reflect long-range land use plans</li> <li>• Model future travel demand</li> <li>• Identify projects and strategies</li> <li>• Conform with air quality rules</li> <li>• Address environmental impacts</li> <li>• Be financially feasible</li> <li>• Promote public involvement</li> <li>• Use performance measures to evaluate system</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect county-wide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and the Washington State Transportation Plan</li> <li>• Include goals, objectives, and land use assumptions</li> <li>• Establish level of service standards</li> <li>• Review at least every 2 years to ensure plan is up-to-date</li> </ul> |

the private sector, other interest groups, and the general public to coordinate and validate data and planning assumptions. These regional models are then used by local agencies in their land use and transportation planning; by the state as part of the statewide multimodal system analysis; and by many other users as a basis for capital, business, and transportation planning. TRPC updates its regional models with refinements from local and state analysis. In this way, all the regional partners maintain a well-integrated planning process.

The RTP also recognizes that just as policies, plans, and projects do not stop at a specific geographical or political boundary within the county, neither do they stop at the county line.

Many Thurston County residents travel to Lewis, Grays Harbor, Mason, Pierce, Kitsap, and King counties for work and leisure, just as residents of the surrounding counties travel to and through Thurston County.

Regional policy makers understand that land use, transportation, environmental, and economic policies and conditions outside of the county may greatly affect this region. To that end, the RTP calls for appropriate levels of communication and coordination outside county borders.

## Requirements

State and federal guidelines stipulate the elements and processes for creating and maintaining the RTP. In many instances the requirements overlap, emphasizing the connection between state and federal regulation and goals (Figure 1-2).

### Federal:

Federal law requires the RTP to plan for 20 years into the future and project the region's needs, conditions, and resources. Within that 20-year horizon, the RTP must contain short and long-range strategies.

Federal emphasis is on a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. The process is to provide consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services addressing:

- Economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
- Increased safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increased security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increased accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
- Environmental protection and enhancement, energy conservation, improved quality of life, and consistency

between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.

- Enhanced integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasized preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Improved transportation system resiliency and reliability, including reducing/mitigating stormwater impacts
- Enhanced travel and tourism

This is to be accomplished through performance-based planning, a strategic approach that uses data to support decisions to help achieve desired outcomes. With direction from Congress, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) published rules in 2017 that provide specific requirements for meeting performance planning standards. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), and Intercity Transit (IT) worked together in 2017 and 2018 to establish performance measures and targets. For more information on performance standards for the Thurston Region, see Appendix L, System Performance Report.

### State:

The state calls for integration and compliance among local land use plans, county-wide planning policies, and the State Transportation Plan. Like the Thurston region, the state also

recognizes the relationships between land use and transportation and requires inclusion of land use assumptions.

Standards and measurements are a state focus. For state approval, the RTP must determine regional level of service (LOS) standards, and how system performance and the effectiveness of strategies will be measured over time. The state also asks that the plan be reviewed biennially to keep it current.

As state law envisions, the RTP guides development of the region's integrated, multimodal transportation system, including capital investments, service improvements, programs, and transportation demand management measures.

## Combined:

Overarching themes permeate both state and federal guidelines. At both levels, the RTP must:

- Actively engage the public in both planning and implementation.
- Comply with laws governing civil rights; respect the needs of older people and persons with disabilities; and foster social equity.
- Promote efficiency, security, safety, and maintenance of the system.
- Focus on both people and freight, calling for integration of all modes.
- Consider the environment and quality of life, comply with specific air quality rules, and address environmental impacts.

- Encourage the use of technology to support planning and operations.
- Carefully appraise the relationship between community desires and community resources, and realistically outline financial and policy solutions.
- Target investments to address performance.

## Regional Conditions

Unique geographical factors in Thurston County guide land use and transportation policies and strategies. The Puget Sound lowlands, prairies, Cascade foothills, and numerous lakes, rivers, and wetlands draw people to the area, but also direct where development and transportation facilities can locate.

Many residents engage in year-round biking or walking. Gray days and early winter nightfall require a transportation system with safe, well lit, well maintained, clearly marked sidewalks, roads, crosswalks, and trails. Because of decreasing revenues, local jurisdictions and the state face increasing challenges to preserve and maintain the system.

Interstate 5 runs through the heart of the region, acting as an essential freight corridor and providing direct access to neighboring communities. However, the freeway also divides some of our region's communities, creating gaps for travelers, whether by foot, bicycle, or vehicle.

Since the 1960s, Thurston County has been among the fastest growing counties in the state – doubling population between 1980 and 2010. Just over half of current residents (53.6 percent) lived in unincorporated Thurston County in 2010. The urban portions of Lacey, Tumwater, and Yelm outpaced their fellow jurisdictions in growth, with Yelm experiencing the highest rate of increase in the past two decades.

TRPC’s Population and Employment Forecast predicts that the county’s 2019 estimated population of 285,800 will grow to 383,500 by 2045. Because of the nation’s aging population and the community’s many amenities – a multimodal transportation system, and advanced health care and retirement facilities – older adults will comprise a larger percentage of the total population. Especially for seniors “aging in place” in the more remote areas of the county, transportation and other social systems will be under pressure to expand to match changing needs.

About 39,600 or one in five workers commute outside the region to work – far more than the 24,200 that travel to Thurston County for employment. While still representing only one in five workers, it is anticipated that by 2045 outbound commuters will number around 54,100 (For more information see Appendix C. Trends and Forecasts).

The government sector continues to provide the largest share of jobs in the region – an estimated 26 percent in 2020. However, in recent years, large retail chains supplied jobs, goods, and services for local residents, and also attracted consumers from neighboring counties.

## Crossing the Border

The number of commuters crossing the Thurston County border daily will increase more than 38 percent by 2045.

|          | 2020   | 2045   |
|----------|--------|--------|
| Outbound | 39,600 | 54,100 |
| Inbound  | 24,200 | 34,300 |

Source: TRPC employment and commute forecast.

Employers and workers are scattered throughout the region. The system does not carry workers from large residential community X to large employment site Y, but instead must provide a variety of routes and travel options.

The region also reflects the economy’s recovery since the “Great Recession.” In 2019, unemployment rates continued to fall to levels not seen since before 2008, the average yearly wage for employees continued to grow, and the median home sale price continued to rise.

## COVID-19 Pandemic and the RTP

*In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Inslee issued a series of proclamations and declarations aimed at reducing the spread of the virus in Washington State, including requiring all non-essential workers stay home and stay healthy. As a result, significant changes in how/whether people travel in the Thurston Region occurred. This also has impacted transportation funding. The data and statistics used in this plan were developed prior to the outbreak, and the transportation model and financial forecast do not take into account the radical changes in transportation choices that continues to occur in the region as of the drafting and adoption of this Plan.*

Despite low unemployment and growing wages, homelessness is a growing problem for the region, especially in the face of the increased cost of housing – for both renters and homeowners. Combined with other social conditions, the number of families in crisis have multiplied. State and local governments, school districts, and transit agencies struggle to provide infrastructure and services to meet the demand. Without reliable, predictable revenues, communities will struggle to serve residents' needs.

Even with these growing challenges, the region successfully maintains and operates a transportation system comprised of dozens of transit routes and services, over 2,000 miles of roadway, hundreds of miles of bike lanes, trails, and sidewalks, almost 90 miles of rail, a marine terminal, and a regional airport. Looking to future needs in 2045, the community must continue to seek new methods and creative funding to maintain this diverse system.

## The Challenge

As the region examines current realities and looks out to 2045, many questions arise.

- How do we sustainably build, maintain, and operate the transportation system?
- What additional steps will we need to take to reach our vehicle miles traveled goals?
- Does new development match growth management goals?
- How does the transportation system adapt to address barriers based on age, language, physical ability, and income?
- Does the transportation system increase economic vitality, bringing new business to the community, and efficiently moving goods?
- What role do federal, state, and local regulations play in where and how growth occurs?

- Are community resources and the burden of payment distributed equitably?
- What are the environmental and infrastructure costs of current patterns and trends?

The Thurston region continues to monitor the land use and transportation vision against evolving reality.

Regional policy makers strive to create a transportation system that easily moves people and freight as efficiently as possible. Opinions vary widely on what that system should look like and how travel should occur. Some members of the community want more bike facilities, and some want less. Some value speed, others safety. Some prioritize the needs of freight, others the needs of people. Many residents use I-5 for local trips and others never use the freeway unless leaving the county. Many people face financial or physical challenges in traveling – no matter the mode.

The challenge is in the balance. Balancing individual and community needs. Short- and long-term strategies. Costs weighed against benefits. Urban and rural considerations. Investing now and sustaining the future. All hard choices, with no simple solutions. Balance.

These challenges will require learning together as a region and resolving to make plans, invest in, and create a future that will be sustainable. As we learned during the Sustainable Thurston discussions, these will not be easy conversations, but they are necessary and we should begin as soon as possible.

In the face of all these challenges, we need to plan for the future:

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities
- Changing Climate
- Changing Population
- Equity
- Transportation Funding
- Legislative Collaboration
- Public Transportation
- Technology



Planning for...

# BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Sidewalks, trails, and roads that support bicycling and walking help make all of our communities more sustainable and healthy.



**59** miles of paved trails

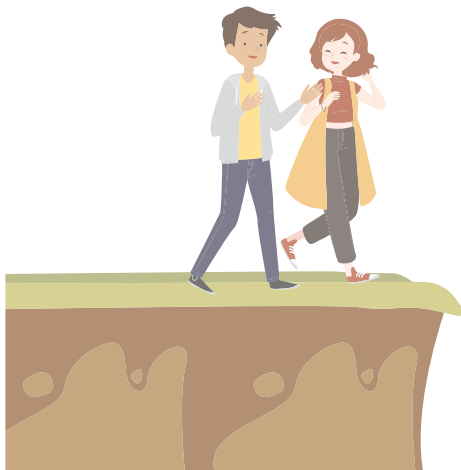
**303** miles of bike lanes, wide shoulders, and on-street bike routes

**834** miles of sidewalks and pedestrian connections

Helping You Get Around on Foot or by Bicycle

## Gaps in the System

- 56 missing neighborhood connections to the existing trail network
- 0 trails connecting Bucoda, the Nisqually Reservation, and the Chehalis Reservation to the regional trail network
- 87 miles of missing sidewalks along urban arterials and collectors



Planning for...

# CLIMATE CHANGE

Our changing climate affects the region's transportation system and our decisions on where to go and how to get there.



**By 2050**  
**we're expecting:**

**94°F** average high temperature in August

**22% drop** in summer rainfall

**5 more days** of heavy rainfall in the winter

- larger more frequent wildfires**
- longer & hotter summer droughts**
- more frequent flooding**  
(including in downtown Olympia)

## We Need to Prepare for:

- Road closures and detours due to summer wildfires
- Road closures and detours due to winter storm flooding and damage
- More expensive road repairs and construction projects



Planning for...

# POPULATION

Thurston County's changing population will impact where, and how, we move in the future.



**89,000** more people

8,000 school-aged children  
34,000 senior citizens (65+) - 14,000 will be 85 or older

**60,000**  
more local jobs

**30,000**  
more housing units  
(apartments, single-family homes, etc.)

**14,000**  
more people working  
OUTSIDE Thurston County

**BY 2045**  
we are expecting  
**MORE**

**We Need to Prepare for:**

- More people using public transportation
- More bike lanes, trail, and sidewalks that connect people to where they want to go
- More vehicles on the road



- More tech-savvy travelers that use autonomous vehicles and micromobility devices such as hoverboards and electric bikes (e-bikes)
- More innovative ways of moving freight and large trucks



## Planning for...

# EQUITY

The burdens and benefits of transportation decisions and investments should be equally shared.



## MEET YOUR THURSTON COUNTY NEIGHBORS



**5,000**  
households have  
no access to a car

**47,000**  
households are  
cost-burdened -  
the cost of housing  
and transportation  
exceeds 30% of  
their income AND  
they earn less  
than 80% of the  
County's median  
family income.

**3,900**  
are active-duty  
military personnel

**30,000**  
live in poverty -  
for a one-person  
household, that's  
an income of just  
\$12,784 in 2018

**2,500**  
are impacted by  
homelessness

**50,000**  
are racially  
diverse and  
24,000 are  
Hispanic or Latinx

**29,000**  
are veterans

**2,300**  
households live in  
linguistic isolation  
no member over  
the age of 14  
speaks English at  
all or very well



**34,000**  
live with a  
disability  
participating fully in  
school, work, home,  
or the community  
is limited in some  
way.



Planning for...

# TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Between 2020 and 2045, Thurston County communities will collectively spend more than \$212 million each year preserving and improving our transportation system.



## What will we be spending our transportation dollars on?

**\$120M** on public transportation  
(Intercity Transit and ruralTRANSIT) – including transit facilities, buses, vans, and service



**\$93M** on local streets, roads, bridges, and shared use trails

**\$18M** on transportation projects that have regional impacts including freeway interchanges, new roads and connections, and new shared use trails

**\$17M** on administration costs and the interest on project loans and bonds

**\$38M** on maintaining and preserving existing streets and roads

**\$20M** on local projects including sidewalks, bike lanes, roundabouts, and turn lanes

## Where does funding for our local streets, roads, bridges, and shared use trails come from?



69% from local sources including property taxes, sales taxes, and transportation benefit districts



25% from state sources including grants and the state motor vehicle fuel tax



6% from federal sources including grants and FEMA funding

Planning for...

# LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATION

Innovative, equitable, and efficient transportation solutions require working with the local, state, and federal governments.



## When we have:

- Unpredictable transportation funding
- Changing state and federal transportation priorities
- Potentially conflicting policies and incentives for new transportation technology
- Competing priorities for crumbling infrastructure
- Strong disagreement about transportation strategies and funding

## We need to advocate for our transportation system:

- Keep exploring ways to improve I-5 and other state facilities
- Maintain and expand public transportation – in our urban, rural, and tribal areas
- Preserve and maintain the transportation system – state highways, local roads, bridges, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Complete projects underway
- Work with our local jurisdictions to identify priority transportation projects and programs
- Speak with a common voice when we meet with our state delegation
- Demonstrate our good stewardship over the transportation dollars we receive

Planning for...

# PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Improving access to public transportation means a more efficient, equitable, and longer lasting transportation system.



## INTERCITY TRANSIT

**931** bus stops

**301** shelters

**118** coaches

**21** routes

**3** Park & Ride lots

**4.5 million**  
trips taken in 2018



**3.76 million**  
trips by bus  
including express trips to Tacoma



**521,000**  
trips by vanpool  
sharing the cost of commuting



**Zero-Fare**  
on Jan 1 2020, Intercity Transit began providing zero-fare services on all bus and Dial-a-Lift routes



**187,000**  
trips by Dial-a-Lift  
helping those that need it most get from door-to-door

**46,000** trips taken in 2019

## ruralTRANSIT

**7 even** coaches on **3** routes in 2020



### FARE-FREE

on Feb 3 2020, ruralTRANSIT began providing fare-free services on all routes

stops at the Chehalis Reservation, Rochester, Grand Mound, Tenino, Bucoda, Rainier, Centralia, and Tumwater

Planning for...

# TRANSPORTATION TECHNOLOGY

Emerging transportation technology is fundamentally changing how we get around - and how well we do it.



## Changing How We Get Around



### Drone deliveries

delivering goods to your home and office through the air and not on the road



### Micromobility devices & e-bikes

making it that much easier to commute by electric bicycle, scooter, skateboard, hover board and so much more



### Hybrid & electric vehicles

changing the type of fuel we use in our vehicles



### Autonomous vehicles (AV)

being a passenger in the driver's seat – even if you're a truck driver hauling freight



### Vehicle-to-Infrastructure communication

making our roads smarter so they can support new transportation technologies

## Potential Consequences of Change:

- **Speeding on sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails** – micromobility devices and e-bikes travel faster and farther than ever before
- **Increased transportation system capacity** – AVs improve the existing transportation infrastructure's capacity simply by driving better than people
- **Clutter in the sky** – fewer vehicles on the road, but more in the sky
- **Maintenance woes** – with more efficient vehicles on the road, tax dollars funded by the gas tax must stretch even farther
- **Car Sharing and Ride Sharing** – decreasing the number of people who own a private vehicle
- **Regulatory lag** – technology changes faster than federal, state, and local regulations



Planning for...

# HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT OPTIONS

With a growing population, high capacity transit options are becoming more accessible to — and convenient for — Thurston Region residents and employees.



## THE NUMBERS

**\$0.<sup>00</sup>**  
 the cost of fare on Intercity Transit's system — including express routes to Pierce County



**15**  
 minutes frequency of weekday transit service on Martin Way and Capitol Boulevard



**27,000**  
 the number of people who live or work within walking distance of a One stop — which serves the Martin Way corridor

**2036**  
 the year Sound Transit's DuPont Sounder extension will start service - planning begins in 2025



**66,000**  
 the number of Amtrak passengers in 2018 using Centennial Station in Lacey. Approximately 52,000 were served at Centennial Station in 2017



**2021**



when the passenger-only ferry study led by Puget Sound Regional Council will be submitted to the legislature

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