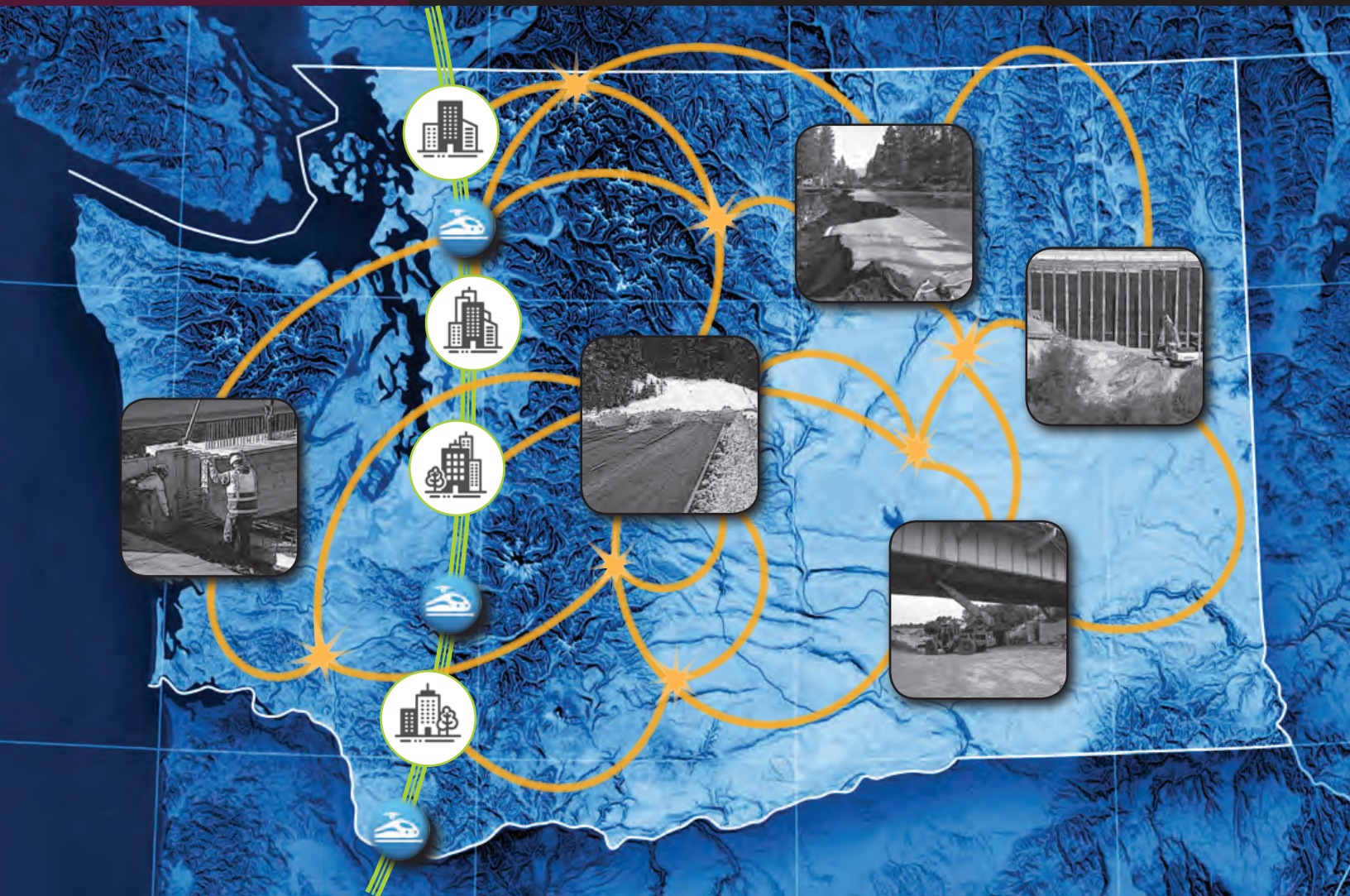


# Reinventing Our Transportation Future

2020 Reflections and Recommendations



Washington State  
Transportation Commission

# Message from the Transportation Commission Chair



2020 has been a year of upheaval: the COVID-19 Pandemic, economic downturn, and the social justice movement. Even with all the challenges and uncertainty, a reliable and safe transportation system is central to Washington's quality of life and strong economy.

All levels of government have invested in our transportation system over the years to keep pace with a growing population and economy. While significant, these investments have not kept up with our maintenance and preservation needs. This threatens our ability to sustain our highways statewide, and our ferry system. This year we are facing an unstable revenue environment and a lack of sustainable funding for the future. Nonetheless we must still move forward with planned investments while we keep our eye to the future and look for innovative solutions to the mounting challenges.

Despite the chaos of 2020, progress continues. A legislative initiated system-wide transportation needs assessment was completed; Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) have been working on updating their local transportation plans, considering the guidance provided in the Washington Transportation Plan 2040 & Beyond; the Department of Transportation has started updating the state's Highway System Plan; and the Commission has begun its next phase of research and testing of road usage charging as a possible replacement to the gas tax.

The disruption resulting from COVID-19 has created opportunities to make positive change. The Commission began a fact-gathering series in July 2020 referred to as The Future of Transportation – Post COVID-19. Industry experts, public and private sector leaders, and various stakeholders shared their insights and experiences on the impacts they have endured and have provided estimations of future change in how they do business. These inputs have provided a sightline to how we move our transportation system forward in a shifting environment and maximize the opportunity for change and advancement.

The key take-away from the 2020 experience is that we can indeed handle big, sudden change effectively – imagine what we can do if change is deliberate and planned. Now is the time for bold thinking and timely action aimed at advancing our transportation system.

The valuable input gathered during the Future of Transportation Post COVID-19 series, along with the input gathered at Commission meetings around the state, has led to the crystallization of Four Big Ideas that, if acted on, will set our state on a path of recovery and will reinvent our transportation future. The Four Big Ideas are as follows (see page 4 for more detail and recommendations):

1. Proactively plan for the emerging Cascadia Mega-Region Encompassing Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, B.C.
2. Address Growing Rural Washington Funding Needs
3. The New Commute is Virtual – Accelerate Statewide Broadband Deployment
4. Transportation Equity Is Central to Achieving Free & Accessible Movement for All

While we face unprecedented challenges, we cannot be overwhelmed nor unresponsive. We urge you to be bold, be innovative, and set forth actions that will put our state on an accelerated path toward progress, equality, and unity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gerald R. Pett".

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# The Future of Transportation Post COVID-19

*2020 has been a year of uncertainty and significant, rapid change brought on by the emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In March, Governor Inslee issued his “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” Executive Order. Many businesses that could, shifted their employees from working in offices to teleworking from home. These changes resulted in significant decreases in traffic volumes and thus, declines in transportation revenues. It is not yet known what changes will continue, or for how long, but there is a growing consensus that many changes will become permanent in many sectors, post-COVID-19.*

This uncertainty necessitates a continual assessment of the ever-changing landscape. To effectively do so, we must explore the many perspectives and insights of key industry leaders, stakeholders, and interest groups as we plan for and implement a new future for transportation. To this end, the Commission initiated a series titled “The Future of Transportation Post COVID-19” in which various public and private entities have offered their insights and experiences thus far, and their plans going forward. Highlights of the Commission’s information-gathering series are summarized here.

## The Future of Transportation Takes Shape

The pandemic forced a tectonic shift in society. Common practices are no more and sensitivities to public health and safety have been heightened, impacting industries in unprecedented ways, forcing change in “how we do business” going forward. The aviation industry is an instructive example: Airlines are exploring design options that reduce touch points, such as touchless overhead bins; airports around the world are investigating ways to decrease crowded check points such as security queues and are testing real-time biometric assessments to enhance the ability to detect the presence of viruses prior to boarding. It is expected that over time, there will be a significant increase in artificial intelligence technologies used at airports to assist with pre-travel screenings.

## The Digital Commute

Aspects of everyday life, such as how we travel to and from work and even where we live, have been impacted. Pre-pandemic most people worked in an office and commuted to work each day. As many employers have shifted to telework, the benefits have been demonstrated, in real time. Successfully transitioning to telework has created new opportunities for many employees to live and work from wherever they want long-term, making statewide broadband access essential “soft infrastructure” that will enable the digital commute to continue and even expand.

## Ride-Share Plays a Vital Role

When we need to physically go somewhere, driving our own car alone, is no longer an automatic. Ride-share services have become an integral part of our transportation system, providing alternatives to driving and bridging the last-mile gap. Ride-share companies are working towards environmental sustainability, with goals to electrify their fleets in the near-future. In response to the pandemic, ride-share providers have made changes within their vehicles aimed at protecting the health and safety of both drivers and riders.



*Construction worker wearing protective gear to protect against COVID-19.*

## Sustaining Critical Transit Service

Transit agencies statewide are innovating and doing their best, despite severe reductions in ridership and revenues in the face of the pandemic. Transit providers have made significant operational changes in response: daily cleaning; fare free service, in some instances; rear door boarding; driver barriers; and balancing between essential & non-essential rider demands. It is estimated that 2.8 million transit riders are considered “essential workers.” Under normal circumstances, this accounts for a third of transit commuters across the country<sup>1</sup>, highlighting the need for reliable transit services.

The ability for transit to fully recover post-COVID-19 will require improvements in four key categories: ridership; fare-box recovery; sales tax revenues; and rider confidence around safety. Moving forward, transit agencies will need to balance conflicting needs – for example the need for social distancing leads to less bus capacity, equating to fewer riders and thus less revenue, all while the demand for transit service remains, especially in under-represented communities.

<sup>1</sup>Transit for America Blog; Transportation For America 2.8 million essential workers use transit to get to their jobs - Transportation For America (t4america.org)

## Transit Snapshots From Across the State

**King County Metro:** Before COVID-19, Metro faced a budget shortfall of \$1 billion over 10 years. Metro is using CARES Act funding (about \$242 million) and revenue stabilization reserves (\$260 million) to cover unexpected costs of responding to COVID-19. Even with offsets, Metro expects a \$2 billion deficit, by 2028.

**Pullman Transit:** To meet social distancing needs, a ten-person maximum capacity per bus was put in place. Due to the limited rider capacity, on high-rider routes, there is a main bus and a trail bus. When the main bus reaches the capacity of ten riders, it stops picking up riders and the “trail bus” starts picking up waiting riders.

**Link Transit (Chelan and Douglas Counties):** In 2019, voters in Chelan and Douglas Counties approved a sales tax increase to expand transit service, effective January 2020. This dedicated tax increase enabled Link Transit to achieve a level of service resiliency that other agencies have not been able to achieve during the pandemic. However, the challenges of the pandemic prohibited service expansions, as was the plan for the tax increase revenues. Having a dedicated stream of revenue for transit demonstrates the importance of having reliable and dedicated funding to transit long-term.

## Freight Keeps Moving

In Washington, the freight industry is one of the largest contributors to our state's economy, with our state being heavily reliant on trade. The pandemic's impact has resulted in significant changes in consumer demand and supply chains, altering the movement of freight and goods at the international, national, and local levels.

But all three freight sectors were impacted in various ways by the stay home order, including the inability to move freight, even if only temporarily, with services at ports and distribution centers being disrupted, and delays in the delivery of infrastructure improvements that would aid freight movement.

The trucking industry kept moving in Washington, despite experiencing an exponential shift from delivering mostly to distribution centers and brick and mortar stores to home delivery services. This dynamic increased demands on city and residential streets, curbside access, delivery space challenges, etc. To ensure the safety of our trucking community, while many other states shut down their rest areas at times during the pandemic, Washington State worked hard to keep rest areas open and sanitized and modified use regulations to accommodate long-haul drivers.

## Planning for the Future

The pandemic demonstrated our strength and resilience, serving proof-positive that we can indeed make big changes when we need to – imagine what we could do if we plan for them. The Cascadia Innovation Corridor issued a plan in 2020 titled “Cascadia Vision 2050: How the Cascadia Innovation Corridor can serve as a global model for sustainable growth.” Vision 2050 sets forth a plan for re-defining our transportation future – and similar to how we responded to the pandemic, this plan is possible with bold leadership and a clear vision.

The Vision 2050 plan is designed to ensure the newly termed “Cascadia Mega-Region” continues to thrive as a vibrant, innovative, globally competitive region. The mega-region runs along the I-5 corridor, from Portland, Oregon, to Vancouver, British Columbia, and is expected to see population grow by three to four million people by 2050, an increase of 30% in 30 years. The plan proposes building hub-cities in underdeveloped areas along the I-5 corridor, significantly increasing the availability of affordable housing in the region and connecting the new hub-cities to our existing world-class cities via high-speed rail. This approach to planning for the impending growth of the mega-region enables us to avoid ever-increasing congestion and emissions, placing us on a path to sustainable growth that accommodates lifestyle and workstyle changes that are likely to continue post-pandemic.

While Vision 2050 would change how we plan for the emerging mega-region, we also need to change how we plan locally. The changes that happened during the pandemic have indeed changed our cityscapes and how we think about asset utilization and increasing multi-modal opportunities. The pandemic resulted in lifestyle changes for many communities, with more people walking and cycling, restaurants moving their services to outdoor spaces, and cities changing street designs and curbside utilization.

While one size does not fit all, a number of different options have been deployed around the state, as we evolve how we utilize our existing assets and infrastructure. Flexible options allow change to take place as we evolve our cityscapes, including utilizing adaptable measures that tend to be low cost, such as painting/stripping and/or portable infrastructure. Cities now have an opportunity to implement planning approaches that work to further concentrate growth in centralized areas which enables the efficient provision of city services, reduces sprawl, promotes physical activity, and supports multi-modal transportation.



# Four Big Ideas to Move Transportation Forward

*As we contemplate how to actively shape our transportation system going forward post-COVID-19, the key to our collective statewide success will depend on the strengths of our partnerships and our willingness to rely on broad-based input. To this end, the Transportation Commission initiated a fact-gathering effort in July 2020, launching a series on “The Future of Transportation Post COVID-19”. The Commission held lengthy work sessions at its monthly meetings, hearing from industry leaders, experts, academics, and public sector entities on their experience during COVID-19, the adjustments they have had to make, and how they see their sector changing and evolving in a post-COVID-19 world.*

*The valued input gathered from the speakers in this series, along with the input gathered at Commission meetings around the state, led to the crystallization of Four Big Ideas that, if acted on, will set us on a path of recovery and will indeed reinvent our transportation future.*

## Proactively plan for the emerging Cascadia Mega-Region Encompassing Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, B.C.

- While planning does currently occur at the state, regional, and local level, actions are typically not proactive, leading urban areas to react to growth as it happens. Furthermore, little planning is in place to address the cross-state and cross-border mega-region emerging between Vancouver B.C. and Portland, Oregon. History tells us that if we don't have effective planning and proactive action, we achieve outcomes that are difficult to reverse:
  - worsened climate impacts
  - increased congestion
  - broadening sprawl
  - insufficient, unreliable transportation choices from a lack of a coordinated/seamless regional transportation system
  - inadequate affordable housing inventory near urban job centers and transit stops
  - inequitable access and disproportionate impacts on under-represented/low income communities

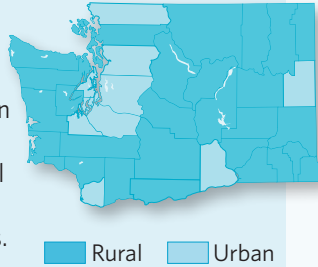


## The Ideas

- Take action today to advance the bold policy recommendations in the Cascadia Innovation Corridor's Vision 2050 report. The recommendations focus on a path forward that leverage high-speed rail to connect our existing urban centers to expanded hub cities with good jobs, affordable housing, and world-class culture. The result is reduced emissions and the creation of flexibility and affordability which is key to our future success.
- As a first step, the Legislature should establish a multi-jurisdictional structure/entity by which plans can be developed and advanced to enable proactive investments and actions in the near-term. Doing so will support the creation of the mega-region we want, rather than waiting to see what we get.

## Address Growing Rural Washington Funding Needs

- The infrastructure backlog and needs in rural parts of the state continue to grow, but struggle to compete for funding against urban and suburban needs as projects statewide are prioritized.
- The ability of rural communities to raise tax revenue on their own is limited due to small populations and will fall short of meeting large-scale investment needs.
- 30 of the 39 counties in Washington State are considered rural.
- Project costs tend to be lower in rural areas, so many projects can be addressed within a given investment level.
- Increased investment in rural areas will result in more reliable access for communities, improved freight movement, and increased safety.



## The Ideas

- To increase opportunity for rural projects to be funded and to provide more focused investments in rural areas, a customized project prioritization system which ranks rural projects separate from urban/suburban projects is needed to ensure balanced investments.
  - Traffic volumes should not be the primary criteria when ranking rural projects - safety, community access, and other unique aspects of rural roads must be measured.
  - A rural highway may have low traffic volumes but may be the only access to communities, providing critical connections for emergency access, the transport of agricultural goods, tourism, etc.
  - Rural roads face increased risks for failure including: washouts due to slope erosion; aging bridges serving as vital links over water; extended inclement weather requiring fortified investments to achieve all-weather road status; etc.
  - In some cases, rural highways are the only or main access to a major destination, like US 101 to the Olympic National Park, attracting millions of visitors that provide tourism revenue and vital economic activity to small towns along the corridor, as well as vital access to the residents of those communities.
- Consider providing regional transportation planning organizations a portion of funding directly, to fund regional transportation needs, with a periodic report back to the Legislature on investments and outcomes.

## The New Commute is Virtual - Accelerate Statewide Broadband Deployment

- Broadband = “soft infrastructure” that enables telework, remote learning, etc., taking cars off the road, reducing congestion, and reducing emissions.
- There are two key barriers to expanding broadband and general utility transmission capacity, according to a June 2020 Federal Energy Regulatory Commission report to Congress: 1) where to put the new lines and 2) how to pay for them.
- The Federal Highway Administration will soon be adopting a new rule to improve coordination for the use of federal highway right-of-ways (ROW) to support the installation of broadband technologies.
- Using existing ROWs along state highways is a feasible way to build the urgently-needed expansion and brings several benefits including:
  - Serving as a platform to achieve “next generation” highways, in which transmission lines, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and broadband/5G infrastructure are co-located, streamlining deployment.
  - Providing equal and adequate access to the internet regardless of geographic location.
  - Supporting a future of autonomous and connected vehicles, improving safety and enhancing livability for all residents.

## The Ideas

- To support fiber expansion and increase resiliency of the utility system, legislation is needed to enable:
  - Better alignment in authorizing wireless (leases) and fiber optic lines (utility permits). Wireless and fiber facilities are statutorily subject to different instruments of accommodation, different restrictions, and different cost requirements. Updating RCW 47.52.001 to authorize placement of fiber optic lines (in addition to wireless facilities) within limited access highway right of ways would clarify legislative preference and allow for increased flexibilities.
  - Exempt highway right of way utility access from 18th Amendment limitations. Traditional interpretation of the 18th Amendment of the State Constitution categorizes broadband facilities as serving a non-highway purpose. As such, motor vehicle funds may not be used towards any utility or related work unless special conditions are met.
- Consider incorporating access as part of future highway projects and planning under a “dig once” policy. Also consider enabling the ability to monetize certain right of way access partnerships.
- Work, coordinate, and communicate with utilities in the spirit of aligning infrastructure and access needs proactively, and identify co-beneficial opportunities that leverage investment plans for all, going into the future.



*Digging a trench for fiber in a right of way.*  
Source: WSDOT



## Transportation Equity Is Central to Achieving Free & Accessible Movement for All

- Transportation should enable personal freedom, access, and connection. However, lingering effects of our country's past still impact our marginalized communities today, including increased exposure to pollution, higher rates of injuries, limited or no access to safe transportation infrastructure and reliable transit, and long commutes to reach jobs and services.
- During the pandemic people of color have been significantly impacted due to disproportionate numbers who are lower-wage, essential workers that cannot telecommute, and transportation related pollution exposure has created disproportionate fatality rates.
- Social justice protests have reignited conversations and analysis on how race and racism play out in transportation.



*Transit agencies meeting the diverse needs of users.*



## The Ideas

- In order to understand where the biggest transportation inequities exist, begin the collection of disaggregated data by race, income, gender, and background.
- Utilize environmental health related disparities data from the Department of Health to gain new insights into where public transportation investments can be prioritized to buffer environmental health impacts on Washington's communities.
- Proactively and consistently engage Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), low income communities, and people with disabilities in transportation decision making.
- Develop an equity analysis toolkit for use in evaluating the benefits and impacts of transportation policies and investments to ensure better outcomes for historically marginalized populations in Washington. Racial equity tools provide a structure for institutionalizing the consideration of racial equity by identifying clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes and develops strategies to mitigate unintended negative consequences.
- Ensure state policies support all people feeling safe using the system.
- Assess how policies around fines, fees, and enforcement impact low-income and BIPOC communities.



# Policy and Fiscal Recommendations

*The Transportation Commission proposes policies to further a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation system for our state.*

**The Commission is directed to provide the Governor and the Legislature policy guidance in key issue areas, including:**

- Transportation finance;
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system;
- Transportation infrastructure needs;
- Best practices for adoption and use by transportation related agencies and programs;
- Efficiencies that will improve service delivery and/or coordination;
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers;
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology-based solutions.

This section of the 2020 Reflections and Recommendations provides specific policy guidance and recommendations for the Governor and Legislature on the topics identified by RCW 47.01.075.

**As in past years, the Commission offers the following core recommendations:**

- Significantly increase funding for preservation and maintenance;
- Establish a sustainable, long-term funding source for our statewide transportation system;
- Balance transportation policies and investments with our state's environmental health and economic development goals.

## Put preservation and resiliency first

Last year, the Commission's top recommendation was to increase preservation and maintenance funding. Unfortunately, not only are current funding levels insufficient in this area, but the revenue shortfalls resulting from COVID-19 have further exacerbated the situation.

The Commission has heard from local jurisdictions and public officials from around the state and the common theme heard all around the state is that all jurisdictions are struggling to meet maintenance and preservation needs, with backlogs only growing. Further, the Joint Transportation Committee's Needs Assessment study conducted this year, found that the state must prioritize maintenance and preservation, noting that "insufficient investment in maintenance and preservation increases costs by requiring funding of full replacement of facilities that could have been rehabilitated at much less expense."<sup>2</sup>

## Streamline our current transportation funding structure

Over time, our funding structure for transportation has become very complex as new fees and taxes have been implemented to generate very much needed revenues to fund transportation programs and services. The result is a complex funding structure that is hard to explain, and even harder to understand, reducing transparency and public confidence in how revenues are used. As the gas tax weakens over time with growing vehicle fuel efficiency, the first big structural change before us will be to transition to a road usage charge (RUC) as a replacement to the gas tax.

While a shift to RUC will address the funding needs for our roads and bridges long-term, our multi-modal transportation system has never recovered from the financial blow it suffered when the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) was repealed in 2000. The time has come to determine how we can fund non-highway related needs and create a more simplistic funding structure in the process. The idea would be to streamline and replace some existing fees, with fewer and more productive revenue sources, carrying the added benefit of increasing transparency and understanding of our transportation tax structure.

To achieve this, we need to establish a funding structure that is streamlined, sustainable, and driven by a small number of revenue sources that generate significant revenues and have clear dedications of use. We suggest you consider the following hallmark sources:

1. RUC would replace the gas tax to fund highways and bridges (subject to the 18th amendment). Doing so increases equity and fairness by ensuring drivers pay their fair share for road usage, regardless of their vehicle's fuel efficiency or how far they drive.
2. Establish a "Transportation Improvement Fee" (TIF) to fund multi-modal needs. The TIF would be based upon the value of a vehicle and could replace various current vehicle licensing fees. The TIF provides greater equity and fairness and is much less regressive than the flat licensing fees currently assessed. It would generate exponentially more revenue as compared to the many small fees vehicle owners pay today. The Commission 2015 Revenue Proposal estimated a value-based fee set at 1.5% of vehicle value, assessed one year after purchase, would generate more than \$500 million per fiscal year.

<sup>2</sup>Joint Transportation Committee Needs Assessment Presentation December 17, 2020



## Increase funding for general aviation airports

Airports are an important part of our economy and our transportation system, moving people and freight. Major airports with significant commercial traffic receive user fees and dedicated federal funding. But many smaller airports with little or no commercial traffic are often underfunded. These airports serve the general aviation (GA) community and are an important resource for resiliency. They provide access for first responders and emergency supplies and are important links to large areas of the state. These airports may receive little or no federal funding and look to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) aviation program to provide important maintenance and improvement dollars. The Legislature should look for ways to expand funding for the WSDOT Aviation Program or other funding programs for local GA airports.



*Moscow Pullman Airport New Runaway*

## Improve Transportation Safety

Washington is a “Target Zero” state, meaning we have a stated goal of zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030. The execution of Washington’s Target Zero strategic plan has successfully driven down the number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries for many years.



*Hooking tow truck to overturned trailer on I-5*

In 2015, fatalities increased, as the state emerged from the economic recession. In 2020, despite decreases in traffic volumes, the number of fatalities and serious injuries has remained constant. Aggressive driving and speeding contributed to this increase. Funding to support efforts that work towards achieving zero traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries should remain a high priority. Also, when developing and assessing policies around fines, fees, and enforcement, impacts on low-income and BIPOC communities should be included.

## Address Climate Change and Fix Fish Barriers

**Continue making investments that enable vehicle emission reductions.** Transportation is a significant contributor to climate change in Washington State. In 2017, 45% of the state’s carbon emissions resulted from transportation, personal cars and trucks contributing over half of this.<sup>3</sup> Work is continuing, by both public and private sectors, to address carbon emissions from vehicles. Progress has been made towards the electrification of vehicles in every transportation mode. However, more needs to be done to achieve the state’s goals for emission reductions.

As the Commission conducts its outreach and information gathering, a common theme that emerged is the challenge of sustaining our infrastructure and environment as climate change confronts us, from wildfires to flooding, to transportation generated pollution. Extreme heat can cause road buckling and freeze-thaw cycles cause pavement cracking and potholes. All these impacts add costs to infrastructure design, repair, and retrofit, as well as decreasing reliability for users of the system.

<sup>3</sup>Washington State Department of Ecology Web Page; 2017 Data - Washington State Department of Ecology



### Fully fund the correction of fish passage barriers.

WSDOT has been working with partners to correct fish passage barriers on state highways, to protect and restore salmon and steelhead runs. As of June 2020, WSDOT has corrected 73 fish barrier improvements ordered by a federal court injunction, improving access to more than 329 miles of habitat. The work that has been completed has resulted in adult fish making it further upstream to spawn. To fully comply with the injunction and timeline to address state-owned fish barriers by 2030, an additional \$2.4 billion is needed.



*Building up around the SR 203 Loutsis Creek arch culvert*

to smaller counties and cities and help them stretch limited resources farther.

A new review of state route designations also can be helpful to cities and counties. The most recent state route designation was done in 1990-91. Three decades of the Growth Management Act have changed the characteristics of city streets and state highways within urban growth areas.

## Efficiencies, Collaboration, Leveraging

No single change in how transportation infrastructure is planned, built, and operated will reduce costs or improve travel options significantly. However, there are several ways to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve the productivity of our transportation system.

**Reduce unnecessary permitting delays, especially on preservation and maintenance projects where the potential for environmental impact is minimal.** Permitting basic preservation and maintenance of existing facilities, as well as in-kind replacement in some cases, should not take years. Reducing the time and requirements for environmental permitting on low-risk projects makes them more cost-efficient and allows for faster implementation. It also frees up resource agency capacity to focus on more impactful or complex environmental reviews.

**Collaborate on state and local solutions for highway and roadway system improvements.** WSDOT's Practical Solutions approach promotes improvements to operating efficiency and safety before considering strategic system expansion. Practical solutions support the right investment in the right location at the right time. Other important strategies include adequate park and ride facilities that support seamless intermodal connections, and an array of travel demand management measures that reduce overall need for single-occupancy vehicle travel.

Deployment of federal funds for county and city transportation projects is another opportunity for state and local collaboration to improve efficiency. Federal funds include additional administrative and reporting requirements that increase costs for most projects—and for those local projects whose price tag is relatively small, the proportion of these costs outweigh the benefit of the funding. By providing strategic support to localities, the state can help reduce the challenges that federal funds pose

**Utilize railbanking opportunities.** Railbanking is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail agency to use an out-of-service rail corridor as a trail until a railroad might need the corridor again for rail service. This interim trail use of railbanked corridors has preserved thousands of miles of rail corridors that would otherwise have been abandoned.

As the Commission held meetings around the state this year, various communities indicated how railbanking has benefited their area. The trails created on former rail lines provide safe and reliable alternatives to driving and enhance recreational opportunities for all ages, especially during the pandemic. At the Commission's Bellevue meeting, employers indicated how the extensive trail system in the area, built through railbanking, influenced their office site decisions, indicating a direct intrinsic value and relationship between multi-modal facilities and economic development. Given the multi-modal benefits to the transportation system and local communities, the state should expand efforts to explore railbanking opportunities and partnerships with local jurisdictions.



*Train in Snoqualmie Tunnel*



*Former railway converted to trail – Snoqualmie Tunnel at Hyak*

**Increase efficiency and leverage private sector ride-share transportation services by establishing a statewide policy and regulatory structure.**

Ride-share services play an important role in our ongoing effort to reduce congestion, reduce emissions, and provide suburban and rural residents travel options where transit services are minimal or non-existent. A statewide regulatory structure is needed in order to achieve consistency of ride-share operations statewide, and to enable not only ride-share services in rural/under-served parts of the state, but to also create the opportunity for active coordination with transit providers to enhance access and address “last-mile(s)” challenges.

**Leverage state assets to attract private sector investments in service and capital delivery.**

Collaboration between public agencies and private businesses should expand beyond traditional concrete and steel solutions. The Commission recommends a new look at systemic, ongoing, long-range partnerships that may include financial contributions, or involve collaboration on property, services, data, or access to facilities.

Innovative partnerships between transportation agencies and the private sector can improve access to public transportation, support housing adjacent to transit centers, and reduce single-occupant trips. Opportunities to improve transportation access and capacity may include:

- allowing private transit providers access to publicly owned park and ride lots in exchange for investments that increase existing parking capacity;
- co-developing park and ride lots with housing, private business, and a variety of transportation modes (public and private) to create a mobility hub;
- co-developing ferry terminals with hotels, restaurants, and tourism offices; and
- using private sector data to facilitate ride-sharing opportunities.

**Prohibit the use of studded snow tires on public roadways effective 2025.**

Studded tires are estimated to cause an estimated \$23 to \$33 million in damage to Washington’s highways annually, and that does not include damage to local streets and roads. More than a dozen states have banned tires with metal studs. Studies show all weather tires perform better than studded tires in the vast majority of winter driving conditions because they have better



*Studded snow tires*

contact with the road surface, except when driving on solid ice. The current \$5 fee established in 2016 on the sale of every studded tire in Washington, covers only a small fraction of the costs in damage they cause to the public roads and highways.



*Microsoft Connector Bus Service for Employees*



# Snapshot of Regional Priorities

*The Legislature established Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in part, to build consensus on transportation priorities that address the unique needs in each region of the state. By law and for efficiency, RTPOs in urban areas are integrated with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to carry out federal planning requirements and disburse federal funds. This section provides information, as provided by the RTPOs, on their activities and challenges<sup>4</sup>.*

***Each RTPO/MPO indicated funding sustainability and maintenance/preservation funding as top challenges they are facing.***

## **The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCG)**

serves as the MPO and RTPO for the Benton-Franklin region encompassing the Tri-Cities Urbanized Area, a federally designated Transportation Management Area, and the cities within Benton and Franklin Counties, as well as the area of Burbank in Walla Walla County.

### Activities in the Region:

- The Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP) was adopted September 18, 2020. The ATP expands on the guiding policy of Transition2040, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), which identifies the importance of an active transportation system that fosters sustainability and safe access to bicycle and pedestrian facilities.



*Sacagawea Heritage Trail on Clover Island in Kennewick*

- Regional traffic count data is a metric to measure performance targets and help identify future roadway capacity needs.

### Facing Challenges:

- The Benton-Franklin area is experiencing one of the highest growth rates in the country. This is a major challenge for the area as it works to accommodate growth and maintain quality of life.

**The Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council (CDTC)** is the MPO and RTPO for a large region of diverse small cities and rural areas, with the Wenatchee/East Wenatchee urban area at its center. With an economy based on agriculture and tourism, the region depends heavily on access to I-90, US 97, and US 2 mountain passes to access the Puget Sound region and its ports.

### Activities in the Region:

- Adopted a 5-year update to the Chelan-Douglas Regional Transportation Plan that defines a long-range transportation strategy for the region.
- Worked with regional partners to secure funding and help initiate NEPA environmental review for the SR 285 bypass, identified in the Regional Transportation Plan as "Confluence Parkway."

### Facing Challenges:

- Continuing long-range planning efforts and building consensus around a transportation vision that addresses population and economic growth during a time when transportation funding to maintain, modernize, and expand the transportation system is uncertain.
- COVID-19 seems to have accelerated societal changes that, combined with disruptive innovation in mobility technologies, makes for challenging times to predict what the future requires from transportation infrastructure investments.



*Construction of neighborhood bikeway connector*

<sup>4</sup>Resource restrictions of some RTPO's resulted in a limited ability to provide information.

**Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization (IRPTO)**, formed in 2016, serves as a public forum to identify, discuss, study, and bring into focus regional transportation challenges and opportunities for Island County.

#### Activities in the Region:

- IRPTO adopted its first Regional Transportation Plan and its first Human Services Transportation Plan, in 2019.
- A region-wide data collection project was initiated that will result in a database which will include vital data such as standard traffic counts and collision data, ferry ridership, alternate mode use, etc.
- The Island Region Vehicle Electrification Study was initiated that will analyze current electric vehicle and charging station usage, inform the public about electric vehicle charging options, and propose recommendations for future charging station infrastructure and potential municipal fleet conversions.



*WSF – Port Townsend to Coupeville Ferry*

#### Facing Challenges:

- As a region, the biggest challenge is maintaining access to and from the islands.
- Camano Island's only access is on SR 532 through Stanwood which is experiencing heavy traffic volumes and slowdowns.
- Whidbey Island, with only one land-based access point to the mainland, is substantially ferry-dependent.
- The possibility of long-term reductions in WSF service on the Port Townsend to Coupeville route is a grave concern.

**The Lewis-Clark Valley MPO (LCVMPO)** is a bi-state MPO that provides regional transportation planning for the City of Lewiston and Nez Perce County in Idaho and the City of Clarkston, the City of Asotin, and the urban area of Asotin County in Washington.

#### Activities in the Region:

- The Southway Bridge was resurfaced this year and was completed in the summer of 2020. River crossings are major components of the Lewis-Clark Valley transportation network with two bridges crossing the Snake River
- The LCVMPO has been contributing time and funds to cities within their jurisdiction, to assist with the development of their local transportation plans. Common themes around needs that emerged include preservation, safety, and bicycle and pedestrian upgrades.



*Snake River Crossing*

**Palouse Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO)** provides regional transportation planning services for the jurisdiction of Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman Counties, which includes 20 rural and urban cities, four counties, four ports, and five transit agencies.

#### Activities in the Region:

- The Palouse 2040 Plan, the first long-range regional transportation plan for the four counties, was completed in early 2018.
- The Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plan was wrapped up in late 2018, which addresses transit operations, expansion, and improvement needs. The plan is currently being updated.
- The PRTPO is in its fourth ongoing year of the Palouse Driver Safety awareness campaign. The campaign is designed to help educate drivers of US 195 and SR 26, targeting the Washington State University (WSU) community specifically. The intent of the campaign is to reduce fatal and severe injury crashes and promote the Washington State Target Zero initiative.
- The PRTPO is currently working on a Regional Active Transportation Plan to improve bike lanes, sidewalks, ADA access, and trail systems in the regional area, expected completion is December 2021.



*Colfax-Albion-Pullman Railroad for Railbanking*

#### Facing Challenges:

- Additional funding for maintenance and preservation is an ongoing challenge.
- Preserving the region's rail capabilities and preserving the inland waterways as viable transportation facilities is key to keeping local commodities moving.
- Providing improved regional public transportation access.



## Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO)

serves the Olympic and Kitsap Peninsulas and includes four counties, nine cities, four transit agencies, four port districts, and nine Indian Tribes, as well as WSDOT Olympic Region. PRTPO became a self-governing region in July 2019, after 29 years of administration by WSDOT's Olympic Region.

### Activities in the Region:

- Completion of a multi-year Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) project prioritization process.
- Overhaul and modernization of a new PRTPO website designed to overcome barriers of travel time and distance in this highly rural region.
- Identification of obstacles impacting local jurisdiction use of federal funds and feasible strategies to increase the efficient use of these funds.

### Facing Challenges:

- Local agencies need funding mechanisms that generate reliable, predictable funding for on-going preservation, maintenance, and operating needs.
- The region relies on a limited number of connections – on land and water – for which there are no alternate routes. A multi-faceted approach to increasing resiliency will help communities better withstand mobility and economic disruptions.
- The pandemic highlights disparities between those who have reliable, high speed internet access and those who do not, highlighting the need to expand the deployment of broadband services to rural Washington communities.

## Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)

is the MPO and RTPO for King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties. Over the past decade, the region has been one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country.

### Activities in the Region:

- In October, PSRC adopted VISION 2050, charting a course for how the region will grow. The plan focuses on shaping new housing and job growth within cities and urban areas well served by transit and services.
- PSRC is leading a Regional Aviation Baseline Study to provide a clear picture of the aviation activities and needs in the region.

- PSRC launched the Puget Sound Passenger-Only Ferry Study early in 2020 at the direction of the state Legislature. The report is due to the Legislature in 2021.

### Facing Challenges:

- Rising housing costs and access to affordable housing continue to be major challenges in the region. PSRC is developing a Regional Housing Strategy, identifying needed actions to preserve, improve, and expand housing stock in the region.
- Before the pandemic, transit ridership in the central Puget Sound region was among the fastest growing in the country. Today, COVID-19 has disrupted regular commute patterns and farebox revenue collection. Improving mobility will be key to the region's economic recovery.
- Unemployment in the region has surged due to the pandemic, with small businesses in job hubs hit hard due to increased telework and decrease in foot-traffic.

**Quad County RTPO (QUADCO)** provides regional transportation planning and implementation within the region of Adams, Grant, Kittitas, and Lincoln Counties.

### Activities in the Region:

- Construction continues on I-90, the unifying backbone of QUADCO.
- As various cities in the region update their transportation plans and conduct studies that will inform their planning efforts, local municipalities continue to utilize funding through the RTPO.
- The City of Cle Elum and City of Davenport submitted additional projects to QUADCO for transportation studies that were approved and have begun.

### Facing Challenges:

- As an agricultural hub of our state, rehabilitation of the rail lines for the Port of Moses Lake, the Port of Warden, and the Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad are critical needs.
- As QUADCO updates its Regional Transportation Plan, the greatest project needs relate to making

travel safer, and preserving and extending the life of our current system.



*Olympic Discovery Trail (ODT) near Sequim*



*Washington State ferries and Kitsap fast ferry in Seattle*

**The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (SWRTC)** is the RTPO for Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat counties and the MPO for Clark County.

Activities in the Region:

- Over the past year significant access and safety upgrades along SR-14 have been implemented, stretching from Washougal to Klickitat County.
- The use of roundabouts at major intersections has provided improved access to the communities of Washougal and Carson, with a remaining project in development in Bingen/White Salmon.
- Investments have been focused on smart transportation infrastructure, low-cost approaches to improving traffic flow and safety on the region's major highway routes and preparing for the development of active transportation networks.
- Through a Regional Mobility Grant award, C-TRAN implemented permanent shoulder running bus operations on I-5 within Vancouver and is conducting a similar 1-year test on I-205 across the Glenn Jackson Bridge into Oregon.

Facing Challenges:

- Impacts of COVID-19 are affecting all agencies across the region. In the short term, major project investments which were in progress at various local agencies have not been impacted. Yet maintenance and operations budgets have been squeezed.
- Forecasts continue to point towards sustained population growth within the RTC region. Serious economic headwinds, despite COVID-19, confront the region if strategic investments in regional infrastructure and housing supply and affordability issues are not addressed.
- More competitive funding is needed to fill gaps where they exist and expand active transportation projects along the waterfront and greenway corridor trail systems, which are valuable regional facilities.



*Port of Vancouver-Trail*



*Cyclist on US 101 in Pacific County*

**Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG)** is the MPO and RTPO in Skagit County. SCOG works cooperatively with local governments, WSDOT, Skagit Transit, tribes, and other stakeholders to plan for all modes of transportation.

Activities in the Region:

- Completion of widening College Way (SR 538) under I-5 and continued state funding for the popular regional transit service connecting Island, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties.

Facing Challenges:

- The biggest challenge facing the region is identifying funding for the operations, maintenance, and preservation of the existing transportation system.
- The ongoing effects from the COVID-19 Pandemic will continue to provide challenges to transportation providers, particularly Skagit Transit.



*Mount Baker from Baker Lake Road*

**The Southwest Washington RTPO** is comprised of five counties: Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, and Wahkiakum.

Activities in the Region:

- Planning was completed for the Six Rivers Regional Trail in Cowlitz County, a future north-south trail connecting Lewis County to Clark County.
- Design and selection of a preferred alternative for the Interstate 5/Chamber Way Interchange project in Chehalis.
- Completion of a bridge deck replacement and painting project on SR 409 in Wahkiakum County.
- Completed a pre-engineering study to produce final conceptual plans for the US 12 Highway Rail Separation Project in East Aberdeen.

Facing Challenges:

- A big challenge is securing sufficient funding to maintain and preserve the existing transportation network.
- Investments are needed to ensure the transportation system to be more resilient in the face of natural disasters.
- Sufficient funding is needed for bridge preservation and replacement to maintain critical transportation corridors. There are 462 bridges in the five counties with 47% being 60 or more years old and over 100 of the bridges are considered functionally obsolete or structurally deficient. The most significant of those bridges is the Lewis and Clark Bridge connecting Longview to Rainier, OR.



**Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC)** is the MPO and RTPO for Spokane County.

#### Activities in the Region:

- The SRTC Board approved a new methodology for population and employment forecasting for long range planning.
- SRTC launched the Data Application Transportation Analysis (DATA) project; an effort modeled after design-build construction principles.
- SRTC was a key partner in an effort to better define the regional transportation priorities for informing state and federal elected officials.
- SRTC began the development of a regional freight strategy as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update.



*Medical Lake Interchange*

#### Facing Challenges:

- With rapid growth in the Spokane region, change-management strategies and streamlining processes are imperative.
- As funding for transportation continues to be a challenge, efforts that help the public better understand the importance of maintaining and preserving the existing system, while still responding to growth pressures, is key.

**Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)** the single-county MPO and RTPO for the Thurston County region, provides regional transportation planning for one of the fastest growing regions in the state.

#### Activities in the Region:

- In 2020, TRPC adopted the “What Moves You 2045 Regional Transportation Plan” addressing a broad range of issues including changing population demographics, improving travel mode split, main street highways, etc.

The plan is supported by a new regional transportation model, increasing the ability to model I-5 traffic, truck travel, etc.



*I-5 Crossing the Nisqually Delta*

#### Facing Challenges:

- Increasing congestion on I-5, flood risk that threatens to close the freeway, and habitat degradation caused by I-5 cutting through the Nisqually River Delta are top challenges.
- Needed mobility and multi-modal improvements to Highway 507 and other alternate routes to I-5, which also serve as the main streets for several Thurston County cities and towns.

**Northeast Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NEW RTPO)** is part of the Tri-County Economic Development District covering Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens counties.

#### Activities in the Region:

- The Highway 21 South bridge was completed in Ferry County after being washed out several years ago.
- The Flowery Trail Project in Pend Oreille County reconstructed the road from Westside Calispel Road to Danforth Road.
- Highway 395, from Addy to Blue Creek was chip sealed, and the Railroad Street Preservation Project in Colville was completed.

#### Facing Challenges:

- Funding is needed for the preservation and maintenance of existing roads.
- Much of the region lacks high speed internet and cell reception is unreliable. Broadband deployment is greatly needed in the region.

**The Walla Walla** MPO and Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization (WWVMPO/SRTPO) is responsible for coordinating transportation investments in northeastern Umatilla County in Oregon and Walla Walla County in Washington.

#### Activities in the Region:

- The City of Walla Walla finished their “road diet” effort, constructing sidewalk, bike lane, street, water, sewer, and stormwater improvements.
- Valley Transit added several all-electric trolley-style buses to its fleet of conventional buses and compressed natural gas-powered Dial-a-Ride vehicles.
- The busy Plaza Way/SR 125 (9th Ave) intersection, one of the worst intersections in terms of congestion as well as pedestrian and bike access, will get a much-needed overhaul.
- During the pandemic, cities assisted downtown area businesses in their recovery by closing streets to motor vehicles and opening up spaces dedicated entirely to people.

#### Facing Challenges:

- The Walla Walla Valley needs sustained funding above and beyond current levels, to maintain the region's transportation system in a state of good repair.
- A 60% increase in preservation funding is needed to get to a 50 year pavement cycle for (non-state) functionally classified routes; and a 200% increase over current levels would allow for a 50-year replacement schedule.
- State highways are of the utmost importance to the Walla Walla Valley, providing vital lifelines for mobility and commerce. Continued maintenance and snow removal activities is critical.
- The Walla Walla Valley must explore and find ways to move towards supporting all people and modes, measuring accessibility instead of counting cars, and creating transportation cultures within a community context.



*Walla Walla 1st Ave Plaza – Outdoor Dining During COVID-19 Pandemic*

**The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)** is the MPO for the Bellingham urbanized area and the RTPo for Whatcom County.

#### Activities in the Region:

- Washington benefits greatly from the \$16 billion in annual trade and 12 million personal vehicle trips that flow through the Cascade Gateway. WCOG's International Mobility and Trade Corridor (IMTC) Program coordinates planning and operations among the multiple U.S. and Canadian agencies responsible for the land-border transportation systems that connect our integrated economies.
- Nearly 22,000 people participate in Whatcom Smart Trips, WCOG's nationally recognized transportation demand management program. Smart Trips participants use on-line or paper trip diaries to track walking, bicycling, ridesharing, and riding the bus, helping to increase awareness of travel mode choices.



*SmartTrips Community Event*

#### Facing Challenges:

- The ongoing shortage of state funding for maintenance and preservation of Whatcom's surface transportation network is the greatest challenge facing the Region.
- Investments are needed to support transit electrification to enable the Whatcom Transportation Authority to move to an all-electric fleet over the next decade.

- Bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements are needed along Marine Drive, which runs from the City of Bellingham to the Lummi Nation in unincorporated Whatcom County.
- A new roundabout at the intersection of Meridian Street and Birchwood Avenue in Bellingham is needed to improve freight capacity, facilitate high-capacity bus transit service, and address bicycle and pedestrian safety concerns.
- Improvements are needed to State Route 548 in Blaine to address significant traffic delays caused by the federally required inspection of freight rail cars entering the US from Canada via Whatcom County. These delays impact emergency response, delay school buses and inhibit economic development.

#### **The Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG)**

is the MPO for the Greater Yakima metropolitan area and the RTPo for Yakima County.

#### Activities in the Region:

- In 2020, YVCOG completed its 2020-2045 Metropolitan and Regional Plan, identifying over 400 transportation projects amongst its 14 member jurisdictions.
- Regionally significant projects throughout Yakima County are gaining momentum, including phase I of the East-West Corridor, and completing Union Gap's South Union Gap Interchange, allowing city efforts to shift to completing the Union Gap Beltway Project.

#### Facing Challenges:

- Over the next few years, WSDOT will begin a multi-year construction effort to replace several intersections along SR 97 with roundabouts, which will cause disruptions on a major traffic route.
- The roads in and near the Yakama Nation experience some of the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the state. To improve safety and reduce these rates, many entities (The Yakama Nation, National Park Service, YVCOG, WSDOT, Yakama County, and valley cities) must work together. This many partners working together can be challenging.



*Yakima Valley*



# Overview of 2020 Work and Activities

*This section provides an overview of the major work efforts the Commission undertook in 2020. It also serves as the required annual reporting to the Legislature on changes made to toll rates, pursuant to RCW 47.56.855. Further details on tolling and recommendations can be found in the Commission's annual Tolling Report.*

## Tolling and Ferry Fare Actions

Tolls and ferry fares were projected to generate nearly \$870 million during the 2019 – 2021 biennium. However, beginning in March 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic sharply reduced traffic and ridership and related revenues. Declines were most sharp through April 2020, but both volumes and revenues remain far below prior year levels through 2020 and are forecasted to remain so through the end of the biennium. A return to 2019 levels is not expected until at least 2023, assuming a return to more normal commute and economic conditions by mid-2021. Long-term, questions remain on whether some changes to work and commute patterns will become more permanent such as teleworking, shared workspaces, and reduced transit use.

Despite the decline in tolling and ferry fare revenues brought about by COVID-19, they remain a significant portion of the state's transportation budget, raising revenue for major capital improvements and system operations, and improving traffic flow on key corridors.

The Commission did not adjust toll rates for any facility in 2020, and ferry fare increases that took effect in May 2020 were adopted by the Commission in August 2019. While the impacts of COVID-19 have not yet led to any toll rate or ferry fare adjustments in 2020, the Commission is closely monitoring volumes and revenues and has begun preparations for anticipated adjustments in 2021. When revising or establishing toll rates and ferry fares, the Commission carefully reviews traffic and revenue projections, considers legal obligations, and listens to affected members of impacted communities.

### SR 520 Floating Bridge

**Rate Setting:** There were no rate changes in 2020 made to the SR 520 Floating Bridge. The Commission is assessing future needs and is anticipating a rate increase in 2021.

The current SR 520 Floating Bridge opened for traffic in 2016, replacing the four-lane bridge that opened in 1967. Tolls are expected to contribute \$1.2 billion toward its construction cost, and also help improve traffic flow. Rates vary by day of week and time of day to maximize revenue and vehicle throughput and minimize diversion to other routes.



SR 167 HOT Lanes

The Commission reviewed traffic and revenue data in early 2020, prior to the pandemic, and determined that the current toll rates should continue to adequately meet the revenue needs and maintain traffic flows. While performance was on track through early 2020, COVID-19 impacts resulted in revenues on the SR 520 Bridge between March and October, being 56% below November 2019 forecasted levels. While the Office of the State Treasurer (OST) determined that the SR 520 Bridge met financial commitments for FY 2020 (through June 30, 2020), it has indicated that an increase in net toll revenues are necessary to avert missing financial requirements in FY 2021 through at least FY 2029. The Commission is working with OST and the WSDOT to identify options to meet these requirements for FY 2021 (beginning July 1, 2021) and beyond and will work with the Legislature to identify a plan going forward.

### I-405 Express Toll Lanes/SR 167 HOT Lanes Corridor

**Rate Setting:** There was no rate change in 2020 made to these facilities. The Commission is assessing future needs but does not expect a toll rate increase in 2021.

I-405 Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) and SR 167 HOT lanes are dynamically tolled meaning the price to travel in these lanes varies based upon throughput and volumes and is adjusted automatically utilizing an algorithm. There are overhead electronic signs displaying the toll rate at any given time.

In 2015, the Transportation Commission set the toll rate range for the I-405 ETLs with a minimum of 75 cents to a maximum of \$10. In 2008, the Commission set the toll rate range at a minimum of 50 cents to a maximum of \$9 for the SR 167 HOT lanes. Vehicles with at least three occupants are exempt from tolls on the I-405 ETLs, and vehicles with at least two occupants are exempt on the SR 167 HOT lanes and are also exempt during non-peak hours on the I-405 ETLs.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has sharply decreased traffic and revenue performance for the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes.

With many large employers in the region shifting to telework and Washingtonians responding positively to the Governor directed stay at home orders, by early April 2020 traffic on the ETLs dropped to over 80% below the traffic levels on the same date in 2019. Traffic levels have improved as the year has progressed, particularly for the SR 167 HOT lanes, but leveled off in late summer

through early fall. By the end of October 2020, traffic volumes for the SR 167 HOT lanes were about 15-20% below 2019 levels, while traffic volumes for the I-405 ETLs were about 45-50% below 2019 levels.

Toll revenue has faced even steeper declines compared to other tolled facilities because both the number of toll transactions and the average toll rate paid on the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes greatly reduced with the sharp decline in traffic volume. For example, between October and December 2019, average toll rates for peak period, peak direction trips were \$4.80 for the I-405 ETLs, and \$4.54 for the SR 167 HOT lanes. But as the COVID-19 Pandemic impacts took hold in March 2020, average toll rates stayed near the minimum toll rate amounts for most portions of both facilities through late summer, with only minor increases in early fall. As a result, I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes revenues were sharply below expected levels for March-October 2020, with revenues 65% below (\$2.4 million) forecasted levels for the SR 167 HOT lanes, and 81% below (\$17.5 million) forecasted levels for the I-405 ETLs.

In 2020, work began on the I-405 Bellevue to Renton widening and Express Toll Lanes project, one of several projects currently planned to connect and expand the existing express toll facilities into a 50-mile ETL corridor between Lynnwood and Puyallup. However, traffic and revenue impacts of COVID-19 for the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes resulted in an assessment of options to defer or reduce costs for the projects. The OST is also assessing requirements for proceeding with bonding for the corridor projects, given these projects are planned to utilize toll revenues from the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes to finance their construction. No bonds have yet been sold that rely on revenue from these facilities.

## SR 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge

**Rate Setting:** There was no rate change in 2020 made for the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The Commission is assessing future needs and is anticipating a rate increase in 2021.

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge has a unique financing structure in that it has scheduled, automatic increases in debt service payments. This fact has led to rate increases over the years to ensure toll revenues can meet the growing debt payments, and all legal obligations including covering the costs to maintain and operate the facility.

Because of COVID-19 impacts, TNB toll revenue from March to October 2020 were 18% below levels forecasted in November 2019. While much less of a decline than seen on the state's other toll facilities, this decline will require additional revenues by FY 2022 (beginning July 1, 2021) to ensure financial commitments are met.

Legislation was passed in spring 2018 stating the intent to provide up to \$85 million in loans through 2030, in an effort to keep toll rates at current levels for the remaining life of the debt service, except for a \$0.25 rate increase as soon as July 1, 2021 (FY 2022). To this end, in spring 2019, the

Legislature provided a loan of \$12.543 million to keep toll rates at current levels for the 2019-2021 biennium.

The 2018 legislation directed the Commission to provide the Legislature with an annual update on the loan amounts needed to meet the bill's intent. With the current and projected impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in mind, the Commission's 2021 Tolling Report includes this update, addresses both the sufficiency of the loan for the current 2019-2021 biennium, and the estimated loan amount necessary for the 2021-2023 biennium. The loan amount estimate for the 2021-2023 biennium will assume the planned \$0.25 rate increase starting on July 1, 2021 (FY 2022).

## SR 99 Tunnel

**Rate Setting:** There was no rate change in 2020 made for the SR 99 Tunnel. The Commission is assessing future needs and is anticipating a rate increase in 2021.

In October 2018, the Commission adopted toll rates for the SR 99 tunnel facility to ensure rates generate the required \$200 million toward tunnel construction costs and to pay other required costs. The adopted toll rates were also set to minimize impacts of diversion to city streets. Tolls range from \$1 to \$2.25 for drivers with a *Good to Go!* pass, depending on time of day. Drivers without a *Good to Go!* account pay an extra \$2 per toll. Toll rates are also higher for vehicles with more than two axles.

The tunnel opened for traffic in February 2019 and tolling began in early November 2019. Through February 2020, traffic and revenue for the tunnel exceeded initial projections, but the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in significantly reduced traffic volumes, and thus reduced revenues from March through October 2020, 45% below levels forecasted in November 2019. Because of this revenue disruption and projected on-going impacts, the OST established that the SR 99 Tunnel did not meet financial requirements for FY 2020 and that options to increase net revenue are necessary to meet financial requirements in FY 2021 and beyond.

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the original and current toll rate schedule enacted by the Commission assumes rate increases of three percent every three years beginning in July 2022, subject to annual review by the Commission. The Commission also anticipated an additional toll rate increase in July 2021 to support funding of major periodic tunnel maintenance costs (facility repair and replacement costs), as required by the 2019 Legislature. Covering these costs with toll revenues is consistent with the use of toll revenues on the state's other toll facilities, but was not initially required for the SR 99 Tunnel.

In 2020, the Commission worked with OST and WSDOT to identify options to meet both the COVID-19 impacts and the previously assumed financial requirements and will continue this process in 2021. This will likely include a rate increase in early FY 2022 (as soon as July 2021).



## I-405 & SR 167 Express Toll Lanes Low-Income Tolling Study

In 2019, the Legislature directed the Transportation Commission to assess options for a possible low-income toll program for the I-405 and ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes. This study began in December 2019 and is on track to be completed by the deadline of June 30, 2021.

Work on this study began in 2020 with identifying existing low-income programs and frameworks around the country that may support developing program options in Washington State for the I-405 ETLs and 167 HOT Lanes. This was followed by an assessment of our state's operational capacity to implement possible approaches. Also, research has been conducted on both how and why low-income drivers use the ETL facilities, and what possible low-income toll program options may provide the most value for low-income drivers of the facilities.

By January 2021, the Transportation Commission will hone-in on two program options for further detailed assessment. An analysis on the needs and costs for implementing and operating the selected possible low-income toll program options will be conducted, as well as identifying the implications of each option on tolling policies, traffic, revenues, costs, operations, and enforcement.

The results of this study will provide analysis and data to the Legislature for initial identification of viable low-income toll program option(s) applicable to one or both of the ETL facilities. While this may provide the foundation for selecting a low-income tolling program for the corridor, implementation of such a program would require the Legislature to identify how the reduced toll revenue resulting from possible discounts or exemptions will be addressed, and may require further analysis and community engagement.

## Tolling Exemption Policies

In 2020, the Commission did not make any changes to current tolling exemption policies. In July 2018, after input from the public and stakeholders, the Transportation Commission adopted changes to non-HOV tolling exemptions to be consistent across all of the state's tolled facilities. Changes took effect on August 1, 2019. These changes have not resulted in the need for a toll rate increase in 2020 and are not expected to do so in the future.

### System-wide tolling exemptions apply to the following vehicles:



Buses



Rideshare Vans



Emergency Vehicles



Incident Response & Maintenance Vehicles

## Ferry Fares

**Rate Setting:** Ferry fares were increased in May 2020, with vehicle fares increasing by 2.5% and passenger fares increasing by 2.0%. In addition, a \$0.25 increase of the vessel capital surcharge also took effect in May 2020. The Commission expects to set ferry fares by summer 2021 in alignment with revenue targets and policy objectives set by the Legislature for the 2021-2023 biennium, and if needed, for the remainder of the 2019-2021 biennium.

The effects of COVID-19 seen on our toll facilities has similarly impacted our ferry system's ridership volumes and revenues. In February 2020, fares were expected to generate \$416.2 million for the 2019-2021 biennium, about 75% of funding approved by the Legislature for Washington State Ferries (WSF) operations in the 2019-2021 biennium.

With the effects of COVID-19, ferry fare revenues are now forecasted to generate only about \$325 million in the 2019-2021 biennium, or \$91 million less than the fare revenue target. However, WSF has also achieved COVID-19 cost savings, such as from related service reductions and statewide budget cuts, reducing projected WSF costs for the biennium by about \$62 million. The Commission will work closely with WSF to identify options to close any funding gaps that remain following Legislative budget adjustments in 2021, and to prepare for the 2021-2023 biennium.

With the onset and progression of COVID-19 impacts, the Commission has been working closely with WSF to monitor ridership volumes and revenues in 2020, and to address possible changes related to the fare schedule in the future. For example, while maintaining the scheduled fare increase in May 2020, the Commission supported WSF's decision to delay approved increases to the vehicle reservations no show fee until October 2020.

Each biennium, the Transportation Commission sets fares to meet the revenue target and policy objectives set by the Legislature. The process begins nearly a year before new fares and policies take effect, beginning with extensive discussions involving WSF, the Commission, and the Ferry Advisory Committee on Tariffs (FAC-T), representing

Ferry Advisory Committees (FAC's) systemwide, citizens and interested parties who use each ferry route, including transit, freight and tourism.

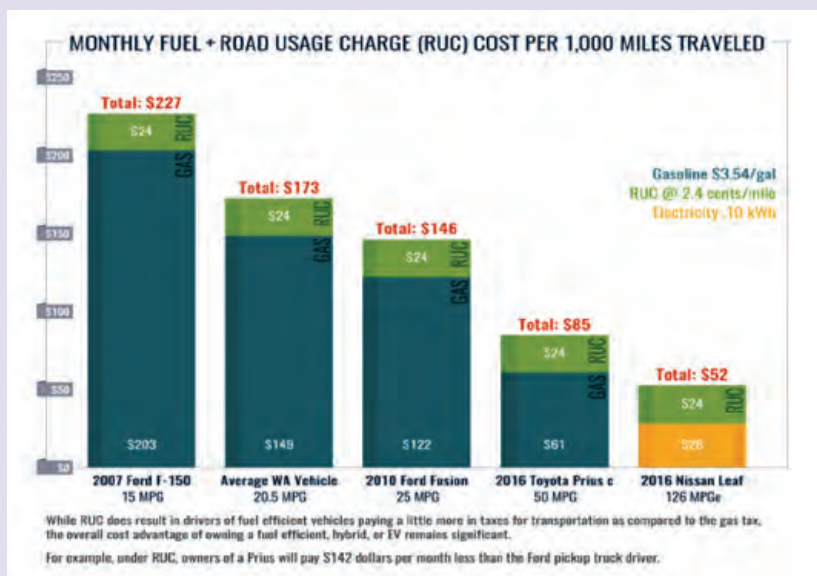
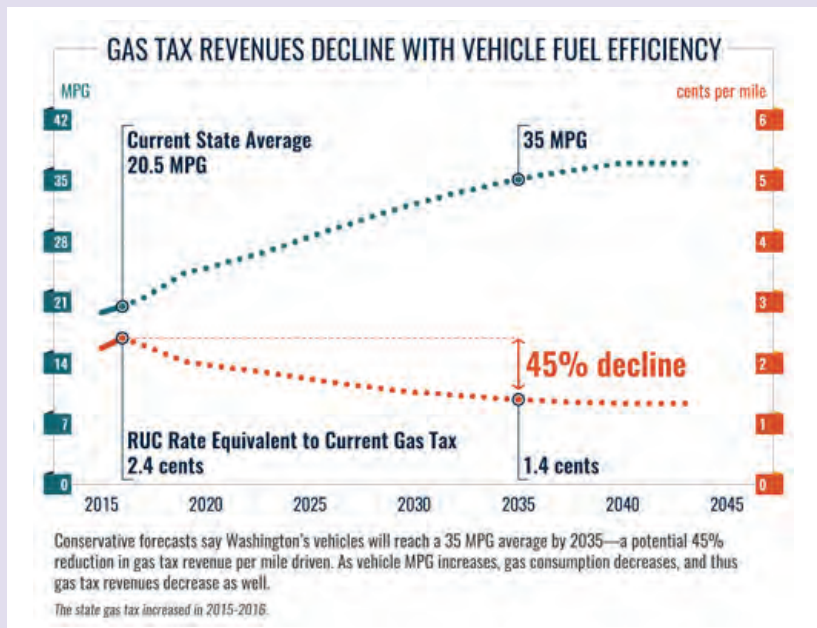
In 2020, the Commission also continued to engage with WSF on advancing strategies to advance the reliability, sustainability, and resilience of the ferry system in alignment with the WSF 2040 Long Range Plan and with on-going administration of the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) survey made up of about 25,000 ferry riders.

## Road Usage Charge Assessment

As vehicles become cleaner, more fuel-efficient, and increasingly automated, our method of paying for roads must evolve as well. As fuel-efficiency grows, gas tax revenues will decline. In 2012, the Legislature directed the Transportation Commission to fully assess road usage charging (RUC), a pay-by-the-mile fee that could eventually replace the per gallon state gas tax.

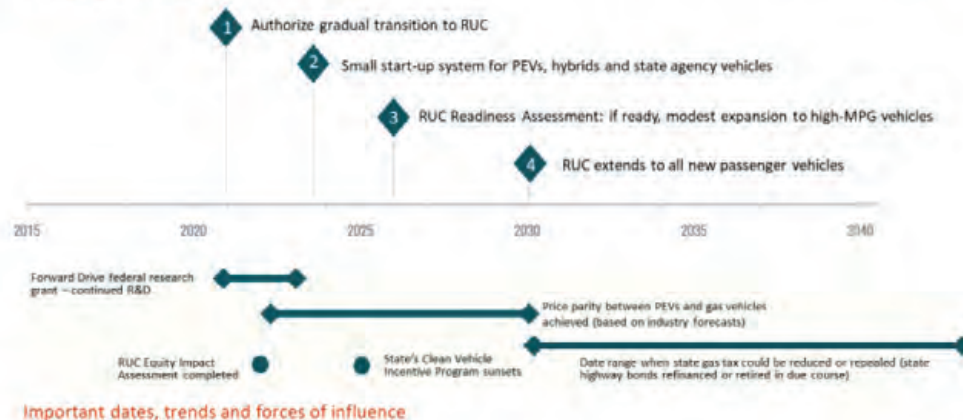
Washington State is not alone in its exploration. Several states have research and testing underway. The states of Oregon, Utah have live RUC programs in operation today. Virginia is currently in the process of setting up their RUC program. The advancement of RUC in these states is currently focused on being a new way for electric vehicles and other highly fuel-efficient vehicles to contribute their proportionate share of roadway funding, since these types of vehicles pay very little (or no) gas tax. Under a RUC system, everyone would pay their fair share.

The Commission determined by 2013 that a per-mile fee system is feasible and eventually can generate revenue equal and greater than the state's gas tax at full scale. In 2019, the Transportation Commission completed its assessment of RUC. With advice from a broad-based steering committee, and the experience and input from over 2,000 Washington drivers who participated in a year-long pilot to "test-drive" RUC, the Commission submitted recommendations to the Legislature in the 2020 session and laid out an implementation plan.



## RUC TRANSITION: BEGIN GRADUAL TRANSITION NOW, BUT START SMALL

### RUC transition milestones







*Diesel fuel being pumped*

As a result of the year-long pilot and significant outreach, support for a RUC as a replacement to the gas tax to fund transportation infrastructure grew from 50% of the pilot participants at the start of the pilot, to 72% at its end. Of nearly 1,500 pilot participants surveyed, one-third suggest gradually phasing in a RUC over 5 to 10 years to eventually replace the gas tax.

While the state considers starting a small-scale RUC program for electronic vehicles and high-mileage vehicles, the Commission's research on RUC continues. The state recently received a \$5.5 million federal grant to advance its "Forward Drive" program which will have the Commission conducting further research on: potential equity impacts of RUC and possible mitigations; sustainability of RUC in the future as ride-share services expands, autonomous vehicles emerge, and car ownership & vehicle miles traveled potentially reduce; reducing costs of collecting a RUC; and testing the latest approaches to mileage reporting, including in-vehicle telematics, improved smartphone apps, pay-at-the-pump, etc. This research will be completed by 2023.

For more information about the WA RUC pilot project and the Commission's ongoing research and assessment of RUC, visit: [www.waroadusagecharge.org](http://www.waroadusagecharge.org)

## Washington Transportation Plan 2040 and Beyond

***Washington's transportation system safely connects people and communities — fostering commerce and economic opportunity for all, operating seamlessly across boundaries, and providing travel options to achieve an environmentally and financially sustainable system.***

This vision statement guided development of WTP 2040 and Beyond, Washington's 20-year statewide transportation policy plan, adopted in 2018. A comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, WTP 2040 and Beyond is consistent with the state's growth management goals and based on the six transportation policy goals established in RCW 47.04.280.

- Economic vitality
- Preservation
- Safety
- Mobility
- Environment
- Stewardship

The entire plan can be found on an interactive website that includes links to all of the regional and modal transportation plans - [www.wtp2040andbeyond.com](http://www.wtp2040andbeyond.com). During 2020, while no changes were made to the WTP, the Commission heard from multiple Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) on how they used WTP 2040 and Beyond to build their plans, drilling down from the goals in the state plan.

Washington State law requires the plan to be updated every four years, meaning that it would be updated in

2022. To accomplish this update, funding would be needed from the Legislature in the 2020-21 Budget. Given the budget constraints created by revenue reductions resulting from the COVID Pandemic, the Commission did not request funds during the 2021 Legislative Session. However, to prevent non-compliance, in the 2021 session the Legislature will need to provide funding for the next update or extend the update deadline.



# Autonomous Vehicle Work Group

Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) and related technologies are rapidly penetrating the market, with lower-level automation becoming mainstream in newer vehicles today, and higher levels of automation being tested and deployed across the country. As of late 2020, six companies had self-certified with the Washington State Department of Licensing their ability to safely test and operate AVs on public roads in the state.

Legislation enacted in 2018 created the Washington State Autonomous Vehicle Work Group, convened by the Transportation Commission. The primary purpose of the Work Group is to identify measures, including regulatory, policy, infrastructure and other changes, necessary to enable and ensure the safe operation of AVs on public roadways, and provide recommendations to the Commission. In consideration of the Work Group's recommendations, the Commission must then make recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor each year.

The Work Group consists of a 34-member Executive Committee, and seven subcommittees supported by nine state agencies. Each subcommittee has a broad-based membership comprised of interest groups, stakeholders, public and private organizations, etc.

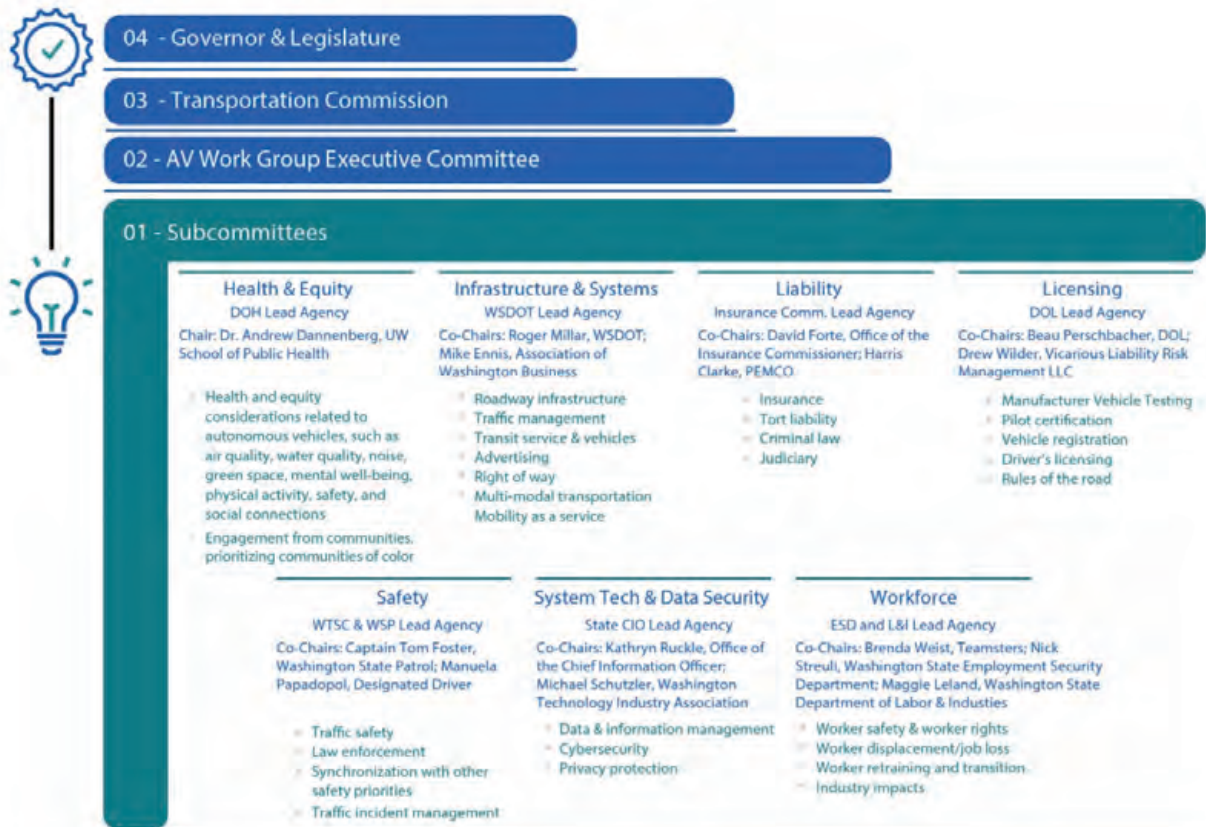
Despite the challenges of 2020, the Work Group's Executive Committee met four times between March and November.

The focus this year was on engagement and education. The Committee heard from AV industry panels, they explored shifts in the AV landscape, and gathered input from industry and regulators on where we can strike a balance between regulation and innovation.

The subcommittees met throughout the year and accomplished a lot this year, despite the shift to a virtual environment. Discussions Converged Across AV Work Group Subcommittees on a variety of topics including: the definition of "Autonomous Vehicle"; the ULC proposed Automated Operation of Vehicles Act / HB 2470 (2020 session); HB 2676 (enacted in the 2020 session) specifically on Section 2 of the bill related to testing and reporting; and developing a cooperative automated transportation (CAT) policy framework.

Several recommendations were cultivated and advanced through the Work Group's process, including policy recommendations needing legislative action as well as operational changes to make the Work Group itself more effective. Please refer to the Autonomous Vehicle 2020 Annual Report for further details on recommendations and information gathered through the Work Group's explorations and research during 2020.

As the Work Group makes its way to the finalization of its explorations and advisement over the next three years, they are greatly enhancing policy development and will continue to deliver significant input and guidance by the time of their sunset date of December 2023 arrives.





## Ferry Riders' Opinion Group

The Commission conducts surveys of ferry riders each year to provide the Governor, the Legislature, the Commission, and WSDOT insights and guidance on ferry operations by the people and businesses that use the ferry system. The Ferry Riders' Opinion Group (FROG) is an on-line community of about 25,000 Washington State Ferry (WSF) riders who participate on the survey panel to weigh in on ferry issues through on-line surveys and quick polls.

While 2020 was to be a busy year of surveying ferry riders, because of the pandemic impacts to travel, it was decided surveying riders would not produce useful data given there were dramatic reductions in ferry ridership over the course of the year. The planned surveying of riders will hopefully take place in 2021 and/or when travel returns to a more regular volume and riders will then have insights and opinions to offer on their ridership experience.

The Commission did conduct one special survey of FROG panel members in the fall of 2020, focused on the impacts the COVID-19 Pandemic had on their travels, their travel experiences, and their general views of travel during this challenging time, as well as seeking their insights on how they see their future travel playing out, considering increases in telework that are likely to sustain long after the pandemic ends.

The special COVID-19 fall survey was in the field for four weeks in October 2020, ending with a total of 7,791 completed surveys. To ensure a broad base of ferry riders had the chance to take the survey, the Commission fielded the survey in three different ways as follows:

- FROG Panel Members: the survey was sent via email and 4,822 panel members completed the survey.
- The survey was made available to anyone in the general public through an open-survey link that was promoted through Facebook ads and through the WSF rider alert system. 1,011 people completed the survey in this way.

- The Commission's "Voice of Washington State" (VOWS) survey panel (unfunded by the Legislature in 2017) was still accessible and was utilized in this special COVID-19 survey effort. Despite its dormancy, 1,958 VOWS panel members completed the survey. The panel was originally comprised of residents from across the state, and in the case of this year's special ferry COVID-19 survey, it presented an opportunity for the Commission to efficiently and cost-effectively seek input from those who are occasional or recreational riders of the ferry system. A shorter version of the FROG panel survey was sent to VOWS panel members who live on the west and east sides of Puget Sound.

Some key findings from this year's special COVID-19 FROG survey:

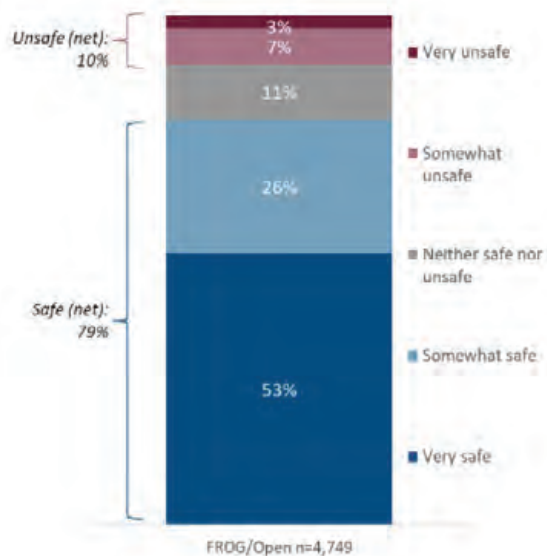


*Washington State Ferry M/V Issaquah*

- 2020 Summer/Fall ferry riders are much more likely to be drive-on passengers (66%) compared to Winter 2019 (46%), and significantly less likely to be a passenger (16%) or walk-on (13%), compared to Winter 2019 (passenger 23%, walk-on 25%).
- Two-in-five (40%) feel their ridership will return to prior levels by July 2021; however, only one-in-four (24%) feel that this return will be by April 2021.
- The majority (77%) of those who have reduced their ridership cite the pandemic as the reason.
- COVID-19 is the biggest cited barrier by far. However, pandemic-related schedule cuts and wait times are also factors. While increased ridership depends on the pandemic coming to an end, riders are also asking for enhanced ferry frequency and service levels, over those during the pandemic.
- Over a third (37%) cite that either schedule increases and/or shorter wait times could lead them to ride WSF more often. Only 15 percent mention being required/allowed to work on site as a reason to increase their ridership.
- Overall satisfaction in 2020 (69%) is similar to Winter 2019 (67%), but significantly higher than Summer 2018 (62%).

- Only 1 out of 10 (10%) feel unsafe when riding the ferries (79% felt somewhat or very safe). Top areas to improve feelings of safety include:
  - Enforcing the mask mandate (31%);
  - Require ferry passengers to only leave their car for essential needs (12%);
  - More frequent cleaning/disinfecting and hand sanitizer (12%);
  - More engaged crew (10%) would also help them feel safe.

### Feelings of Health and Safety Riding WSF During the COVID-19 Pandemic

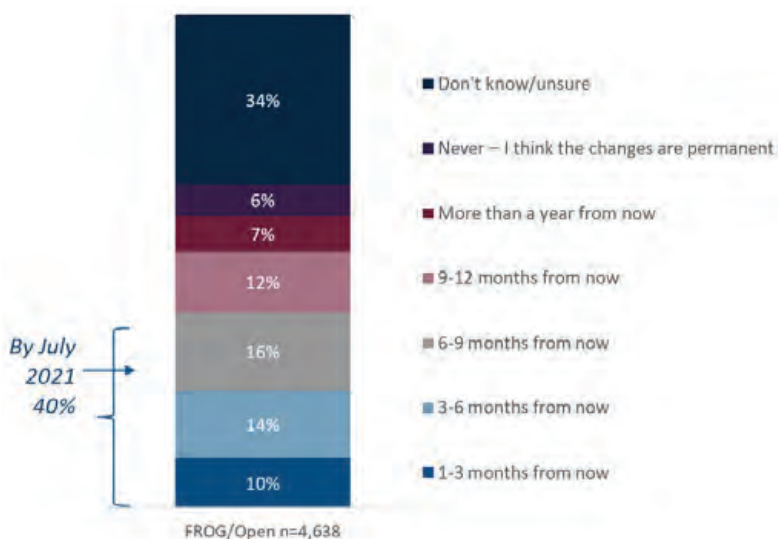


## Naming Transportation Facilities

The Commission is authorized to name state highways, bridges, and ferries. The following naming actions occurred in 2020:

- February:** Resolution 738 named a portion of US 97 through Klickitat County the "World War II Veterans Memorial Highway", in memory of the more than 16 million American men and women who fought in World War II.
- June:** Resolution 739 named a portion of State Route 20, from milepost 90 to milepost 105, the "Skagit County Sheriffs' Office Deputy Alan Hultgren Memorial Highway" and Resolution 740, naming a portion of State Route 20 from milepost 52 to milepost 59, the "State Trooper Thomas Hendrickson Memorial Highway."
- September:** Resolution 741 designated SR 927 the "Gold Star Memorial Highway", recognizing the surviving families left behind who visit the Washington State Veterans Cemetery.
- October:** The portion of State Route 167 where all lanes are tolled, as well as the tolled portion from I-5 to the Port of Tacoma, was designated as the "State Route 167 Expressway." The Commission also designated the portion of State Route 509 where all lanes are tolled, the "State Route 509 Expressway."

### Anticipated Return to Ridership Levels





# Partners in Transportation

*Each community and region in our state has unique transportation needs, challenges, and successes. This section presents key findings – a top 10 list – from the Commission’s 2020 local meetings in Bellingham, Pullman, and Bellevue. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, all of the local meetings were held virtually. The Commission’s local meetings focus on hearing from city, county and regional representatives, business, transit, tribes, etc. to gather information on transportation opportunities, challenges, and needs they are facing.*

## Bellingham



1. Whatcom County operates a ferry system which was established in the 1960s and is nearing its end of life. Whatcom County needs approximately \$30 million dollars to bring their ferry, the M/V Whatcom Chief, up to current Coast Guard safety standards and requirements and meet the County’s climate preservation goals.
2. In 2005, the Port of Bellingham acquired the Georgia Pacific Mill property (approximately 137 acres) initiating a long-term project to redevelop and revitalize its waterfront. The project is intended to restore the health of the land and water, increase public access to water, and rebuild the waterfront economy. More than \$65 million, from all partners, has been invested thus far.
3. The Whatcom County Rural Broadband Project has the goal of providing quality affordable broadband to businesses and residents in rural Whatcom County. The project, scheduled to start in 2021, will provide approximately 113 miles of fiber optics network, capable of transmitting large amounts of data, and could possibly be expanded to include last-mile connections (Fiber to the Home). The current project is estimated to cost \$10 to \$15 million.
4. The Lummi Nation operates a transit system providing key services to Lummi members who do not have reliable transportation or a driver’s license. Their transit system serves the reservation and connects to Ferndale for travel into Bellingham. There are limited essential services on the reservation, so this service provides vital access to neighboring towns. There are no fares and the service is open to the public.
5. The Lummi Nation and local governments are working on a traffic congestion mitigation project at I-5 and Slater Road. Improvements will include widening the road, building a bridge, and creating two roundabouts. The project is important to the Lummi Nation, City of Ferndale, and the oil refineries.



US-Canada Peace Arch Border Crossing - Blaine

6. The Greenway Program has been funded by four property tax levies, since 1990. The program links Bellingham’s trails, ridge tops, and shoreline corridors to create a continuous series of parks, forests, and greenbelts, for both people and wildlife, with 40 acres of trail corridors.
7. The Blaine US-Canada border crossing ranks in the top five busiest US-Canada border crossings nationally. Pre-COVID, 20% of the daily vehicle trips in and out of Bellingham came from Canada. Since March 2020, the US-Canada border has been closed for non-essential trips. This closure has resulted in significant economic impacts to the Whatcom County region and the City of Bellingham.
8. Transportation in Bellingham has been greatly impacted during the pandemic. Vehicle traffic volumes are down by approximately 50% citywide. It is estimated that 25-30% of people are working from home.
9. Bellingham’s comprehensive plan includes a multimodal transportation system plan that places focus on ensuring all mobility needs from all modes are carefully considered, balanced, and implemented so that the citywide multimodal transportation system continues to work for everyone.
10. A unique program to promote multimodal transportation usage, Whatcom Smart Trips is a partnership between local government, public agencies, employers, and schools to promote transportation by walking, bicycling, sharing rides, and riding the bus. Any trip, that starts and ends in Whatcom County that replaces a drive-alone vehicle trip is eligible to be recorded. Participants are eligible for incentives from local businesses. In elementary schools, Smart Trips hosts fun and instructive bicycle skills courses.

## Pullman



1. Pullman Transit is one of four city-run transit systems in Washington. The system heavily relies on a local utility tax for its funding, which constitutes 25% of their operating budget.
2. Pullman Transit has established a unique and efficient approach to dealing with COVID-19 impacts. To ensure riders are not left at the curb, they have a lead bus picking up passengers, and a second bus following. When the lead bus reaches the capacity of ten riders, it stops picking up riders and the “following bus” starts picking up waiting riders.
3. In Whitman, Garfield, Columbia, and Asotin Counties, 73% of county roads are unpaved due to a lack of funding. This is about 450 miles of road, including many arterials. Across the region, there are about 350 county owned bridges, 72 of which are deficient.
4. Starting in 2015, the Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport has been under active construction to expand capacity. The expansion is scheduled to be complete in 2021. The project was possible due to several partnerships including federal, state, and local entities and private donations, indicating the complex funding environment and challenges airports face in addressing their infrastructure needs. The Pullman-Moscow airport services two states, multiple universities and will enable significant economic development in the region.
5. Improving traffic safety is a priority for the City of Pullman. The city selected traffic safety projects based on data and community input. The highest prioritized projects were improving crosswalks around schools and creating bike trails.



*Port of Almota's Grain Loading Facility*

6. The City has celebrated significant accomplishments related to expanding pedestrian and bike trails, with many miles of bike and pedestrian trails put in place over the last twenty years. In 2007 and again in 2018 voters approved bonds specifically to build the trail system.
7. The City's top transportation challenge is lack of preservation funding. Revenue from the City's Street Fund cannot keep up with existing pavement maintenance needs, so the City has become dependent on grant funding, creating more uncertainty in their ability to plan and deliver preservation projects.
8. The Nez Perce Tribe's (NPT) road maintenance program was started in the Spring of 2014. The program operates on a \$45,000 annual budget, with their annual maintenance need being about \$36 million. Due to the lack of sufficient funding, they are in a position of reacting to emergencies and doing repairs as they arise, to keep the roads safe and functional.
9. Transit is a valuable asset to rural and tribal communities. The NPT Appaloosa Express began service thirteen years ago. The Express has three routes, covering about 75 miles up-river, and servicing eight small communities and Lewiston, Idaho.
10. Demonstrating the direct connection between economic activity and transportation, the Columbia Pulp, headquartered in Dayton with plants in Pomeroy and Starbuck, in Southeastern Washington allows for year-round straw availability and delivery. With transportation access a key consideration in siting this facility, it has mainline rail and interstate highway access, with a natural gas pipeline running through it. The area has seasonal road traffic, roads and bridges in good conditions, and good maintenance response during weather incidents. This is important for bringing in materials, moving out product, and safe and reliable conditions for employee commuting.



## Bellevue



1. Bellevue is investing in transit-oriented development around its light rail stations to enable more pedestrian and non-motorized access to services, creating a hub environment connecting the public to transit services and co-locating businesses. In the BelRed area alone, Bellevue is investing over \$300 million in street and infrastructure improvements. Completing the SR 520/124th Avenue NE Interchange is critical to connecting BelRed to the rest of the region.
2. Hopelink, a local non-profit serving homeless and low-income families, reported that 50% of household income in King County is spent on housing and transportation, with annual transportation costs reaching over \$13,000, representing 19% of household incomes on average. Bellevue is partnering with King County Metro and Hopelink to provide a fast, free ride, for residents of the Crossroad neighborhood, from homes to bus stops in areas with lower incomes and lower car ownership rates.
3. As the Puget Sound faces an affordable housing crisis, Bellevue's Affordable Housing Strategy aims to reduce commute times by enabling people to live close to where they work. Bellevue is on-track to meet its 10-year goal to produce 2,500 affordable units, including housing near light rail stations.
4. The Eastrail is a pathway project that will connect the communities on the eastside including Renton, Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, Woodinville, and Snohomish. This former rail corridor provides not only new recreation opportunities, but also economic development and attracting new businesses to the area. While a large multijurisdictional collaboration, the trail is also a strong example of public-private collaboration.
5. Transportation remains a top priority for Bellevue's business community. The Bellevue Downtown Association and Bellevue Chamber of Commerce are aligned on the major projects and continue to support a multimodal future with stronger regional connectivity. The sync up of land use and transportation plans, along with private development and community assets, are unlocking significant job and housing growth on the near horizon.



*East Link Light Rail NE 8th Downtown Bellevue. (Photo by King County Parks)*

6. Bellevue is one of the first cities in the nation to have a 100% adaptive traffic signal system. Bellevue's network of signals can be quickly adjusted to reduce congestion or shift vehicle flows away from collision sites. This system reduced travel times in Bellevue by 25-35% during peak hours.
7. Bellevue City Council has an ambitious goal to eliminate serious injury and fatality collisions by 2030. Bellevue is leveraging fast-evolving new technologies, improved street infrastructure, lower vehicle speeds, and enhanced public awareness to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes.
8. Sound Transit's East Link light rail and I-405 bus rapid transit will make regional transit faster and more reliable, transforming movement on the Eastside. For example, using the bus rapid transit from Lynnwood to Bellevue will cut the amount of travel time in half to about 35 minutes. Sound Transit and the cities on the Eastside of Lake Washington are working to keep these projects on schedule and prevent construction schedule disruptions and funding impacts from the COVID-19 Pandemic.
9. WSDOT & Eastside cities have made great progress on completing the I-405 Master Plan, but there is more work to be done. The Bellevue to Lynnwood ETLs have improved throughput and generated revenue for key I-405 projects. The Renton to Bellevue ETLs are under construction and will incentive carpooling and support bus rapid transit.
10. By 2025, the City of Bellevue expects to add 30,000 new jobs to the city. The City Council is choosing to create dense housing and employment centers that are supported by transit. As a city that is at the crossroads of three major freeways (I-405, I-90, and SR 520), efficient accessibility in and out of the city is critical to supporting Bellevue's growth.

# Commission Roles and Responsibilities

## Key Facts

The Washington State Transportation Commission is a seven-member body of citizens appointed by the Governor for six-year terms. The WSDOT Secretary and a Governor's Office representative serve as ex officio members.

The Commission provides an open public forum for transportation policy development. It reviews and assesses the entire transportation system across the state and issues the state's 20-year Transportation Plan. As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission adopts state highway tolls and sets ferry fares. The Commission also conducts special studies and projects as directed by the Legislature.

## Current Responsibilities in Detail

### Washington Transportation Plan

Every four years, the Commission recommends to the Legislature a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, which also addresses local and regional needs. The plan is consistent with the state's growth management goals and is based upon the statutory transportation policy goals.

### Ferry Fares and Highway Toll Responsibilities

The Commission adopts tolls for all state toll facilities including: the SR 520 Bridge, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), the SR 167 HOT Lanes and the I-405 Express Toll Lanes, and the SR 99 Tunnel. It also actively monitors and assesses traffic and toll revenue; reviews and oversees toll collection processes, costs, and operational policies; and serves as a public forum for input on tolling. The Commission adopts fare policies for Washington State Ferries (WSF) and reviews and adjusts fares. It reviews the long-range ferry system capital plan and works with WSF in developing operational strategies.

### Ferry Customer Survey

The Commission conducts surveys of ferry customers annually, utilizing the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) survey panel made up of over 25,000 ferry riders. Data gathered from the FROG panel helps to inform WSF level of service, customer satisfaction, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions.

### Policy Guidance

The Commission offers policy guidance and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on a multitude of transportation topics and issues, including:

- Transportation finance and funding.
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system.
- Transportation infrastructure needs.

- Efficiencies to improve service delivery and intermodal coordination and connectivity.
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers.
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and technology.

## Public Involvement and Outreach

The Commission conducts public outreach through meetings held in Olympia and in communities throughout the state focusing on local and regional transportation issues. The Commission also gathers statewide public input via its FROG survey panel, special projects and studies, and its public email and web site services.

## Transportation Innovative Partnerships Program

The Commission may receive and may solicit concepts or proposals for eligible public-private partnership (PPP) projects. In consultation with the Governor, it may execute, reject, or continue negotiations on proposed PPPs projects.

## Route Jurisdiction Transfer Program

Cities, counties, or WSDOT may petition the Commission to consider a revision to the state highway system. Once its review is complete, the Commission forwards a recommendation to the Legislature for final action.

## Naming State Highways and Bridges

The Commission names state highways, bridges, and ferry vessels. After receiving a naming request, the Commission considers community support and consults with WSDOT before acting to name a transportation facility or vessel.

## Special Studies

The Commission conducts special studies or projects as directed by the Legislature. Current studies underway: The Road Usage Charge (RUC) is under assessment as a replacement to the gas tax. In January 2020, the Commission submitted a final report to the Governor and Legislature. The Commission began a new phase of RUC research in 2020, as directed by the Legislature, which will conclude in 2023.

The Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Work Group advises the Commission in its task to make recommendations to the Legislature on policies that will enable the safe accommodation of AVs on public roadways statewide.

A Low-Income Tolling Study was funded in 2019 to assess options, costs, and benefits, of implementing a low-income tolling program for users of the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT Lanes.

For more information on the WSTC, please visit our website: [wstc.wa.gov](http://wstc.wa.gov)



# Commissioners



## **Jerry Litt, Chair, Grant County**

Jerry brings 40 years' experience in planning and community development to the Commission. He was the Director of Planning and Community Development for the City of Lacey for 13 years, following 10 years with Douglas County, and has done

consulting throughout Eastern Washington. His experience includes developing Douglas County's award winning GMA public involvement program and the City of Lacey's "Designing Downtown 2000" program. He has been an executive board member for the Washington City Planning Director's Association, a past president of the Washington County and Regional Planning Director's Association, and a member of the Transportation Improvement Board. Appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2011, Jerry was reappointed by Governor Inslee in 2017. His term expires June 30, 2023.



## **Roy Jennings, Vice Chair, Clark County**

Roy retired as a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer after 20 years of honorable service in the United States Marine Corps, where he worked on various transportation projects including airports, railheads, and road building.

In 1997, he and his family moved to Southwest Washington, where he drove a transit bus for over 20 years. A graduate of the University of Oregon Labor Education & Research Center, Roy has served as the Secretary-Treasurer, Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, as a member of the Executive Board, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, and on the Board of Directors for C-TRAN, the transit agency in Clark County. He is currently Treasurer of the Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2014, Roy was reappointed by Governor Inslee in 2019. Roy's second term expires June 30, 2025.



## **Debbie Young, San Juan County**

Debbie brings 30 years of management, negotiation and natural resources experience to the Commission. She worked in the utility industry for over 20 years as the Natural Resources Manager for Tacoma Power, leading the federal licensing process for Tacoma's

hydroelectric projects. Debbie has served on the National Hydropower Association Board, the Tahoma Land Conservancy, and the Forterra Board of Directors. She also served on the Nisqually River Council for over 15 years, including a term as Chairman. Debbie now resides on Lopez Island where she and her husband operate a small farm providing meat and specialty food products to customers in the Puget Sound region. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2015 for a partial term, she was reappointed in 2016. Her term expires June 30, 2022.



## **Shiv Batra, King County**

Shiv was a co-founder and President of a US based engineering company for over two decades. He has held leadership roles in numerous engineering and construction organizations, promoting innovations,

technology transfer, civic, and professional development activities locally, nationally, and internationally. He also served two terms as a US Commissioner for the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congress (PIANC). Shiv and his wife are active in many local and international non-profit organizations. Appointed by Governor Inslee in January 2016, Shiv was reappointed in 2019. His term expires June 30, 2025.



## **Hester Serebrin, King County**

Hester is the Policy Director at Transportation Choices Coalition, a statewide organization working to bring Washingtonians more affordable, sustainable, and reliable transportation choices to connect them with jobs, housing, education, and each other.

With partner organizations, she develops transportation policy recommendations to improve health and equity outcomes. A member of the Executive Board of the Puget Sound Regional Council, Hester sits on several of its committees. She has a Bachelor's degree from Reed College and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance. She is a two-time winner of the Women's Transportation Seminar Senator Scott White Memorial Scholarship. Hester was appointed by Governor Inslee in 2015. Her term expires June 30, 2021.



## **James "Jim" A. Restucci, Yakima County**

Jim has over 35 years of government service as a soldier in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard for 20 years and as a city official. The mayor of Sunnyside from 2010 to 2018, he is now serving his 5th term on the

City Council. Jim has chaired the Yakima Valley Transportation Policy Board for the past 9 years. He served as President of the Association of Washington Cities in 2016, and also was President of People for People, Inc. Jim currently oversees the daily operations of a technology services company he co-founded in 2002. Jim was appointed by Governor Inslee in 2018. His term expires June 30, 2024.



## **Kelly Fukai, Spokane County**

Kelly's career has focused on building and cultivating relationships with officials at all levels of government as well as in the aviation, energy, electrical and electronic manufacturing fields. Currently, Kelly is the Manager of Public and External Affairs at Spokane International

Airport. She brings over 20 years of experience in leading and working with diverse groups with divergent interests in the development of collaborative and comprehensive plans and policy to grow necessary infrastructure, enhance economic and workforce development, and support community interests. She has previously worked at Avista, the Pinnacle Marketing Group and Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories. Kelly earned a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and Master's degree in Business Administration and Management from Gonzaga University. Kelly and her family reside in the City of Spokane. Appointed by Governor Inslee in June 2020. Her term ends June 2026.



**Washington State  
Transportation Commission**

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