



PUBLIC COMMENTS ON DRAFT WTP 2035

INITIAL SUMMARY OF RECURRING ISSUES AND THEMES

This is an initial summary of written and verbal comments received at the five open houses and two webinars conducted following public release of the Draft WTP 2035. It was prepared for use in informational discussions with the WTP Advisory Group and Steering Committee. It includes excerpts from written comments that were delivered directly to the Transportation Commission. These examples are organized according to key challenges (e.g., transportation funding, congestion reduction) as well as by the state's statutory transportation goals, (e.g., economic vitality, environment.) This summary is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of comments, but a synthesis of some of the more frequently-heard concerns and suggested solutions. This information, together with the detailed written comments offered by a large number of public agencies, stakeholder organizations, and others, was used to revise the priorities, strategies and actions in the final WTP 2035.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Multiple comments addressed the current/recent reliance on debt financing; some recommended taking more of a pay-as-you-go approach, others asked whether there was an optimal balance of cash vs. debt funding for projects.

Some commenters expressed a preference for raising the rate of existing funding source rates to reflect inflation, rather than looking for new funding sources or moving more heavily towards direct user fees. This approach specifically noted broad levies such as the fuel tax, licensing and registration fees, existing tolls, and ferry fares as preferable to totally new sources for state funding. Variations on the theme recommended more aggressively shifting transportation funding away from user fees to general tax dollars, reflecting the reality that everyone depends on and benefits from the transportation system.

Reaction to expanded use of tolling is mixed. There is more support for tolling with certain caveats, e.g., volume discount for regular users. There are concerns about the regressive nature of tolls. Numerous concerns about electronic tolling due to privacy concerns, as well as GPS-based road usage charge, due to privacy and anonymity concerns.

Washington State Ferries should make a more clear connection between ferry fares and ferry system utilization/efficiency, e.g., higher charge for longer autos, lower rate for multiple riders in a single vehicle. Achieving a higher farebox recovery ratio for WSF was suggested.

There is a generally negative reaction to "privatization" of any transportation facilities or services, yet generally positive support for more employer-funded transit and related services.

Several specific funding and financing recommendations were received; this is a representative sample:

- Suggest earmarking 100% of sales tax on vehicles for roadway maintenance and preservation.
- Provide more local options for transportation funding, particularly for project-specific funding.
- Implement a state personal income tax to provide additional transportation funding.

- Implement some form of bicycle user fee to support spending on bike infrastructure.
- Manage state and local spending on transportation effectively, e.g., renegotiate lower debt rates whenever possible, don't require public agencies to pay state sales tax on transportation project.

ECONOMIC VITALITY AND FREIGHT MOBILITY

Many comments were received in support of protecting and improving freight mobility, e.g.:

- Give priority to shipments of Washington produce and products over trans-shipment of energy resources (oil and coal).
- Acknowledge and give priority to perishable farm shipments over non-perishable energy shipments.
- Invest in more all-weather roads.
- Through appropriate land use planning, zoning, access management and other techniques, protect the viability of industrial land that supports ports and other freight and logistics activity, in order to preserve and create economic development opportunities in these areas.

Additional highway crossing(s) of the Columbia in the Vancouver/Portland region was recommended in multiple comments. Commentators offered a variety of reasons, including improved economic vitality for southwestern Washington, improved freight mobility in the region, and accommodating already-planned and/or projected growth on both sides of the border.

MOBILITY AND CONGESTION REDUCTION

Reducing travel times and relieving roadway congestion should be a more evident goal in the plan. This should be achieved through a combination of transportation demand management (TDM), improved operational efficiency, and better system management, not solely through capital expansion projects.

Several comments encouraged the state to provide more incentives to use of alternative (more fuel efficient or more roadway-capacity efficient) modes of travel, e.g.:

- Provide additional incentives so that WA businesses encourage more employees to telecommute or take alternative transportation.
- Provide tax reductions or fee waivers to individuals to travel by mode other than auto (or SOV.)

Numerous comments were received on improving intermodal connectivity, e.g., plane to train, train to ferry, and ferry to bus. This is a particularly strong sentiment in ferry communities.

Numerous comments also were received on connectivity and congestion effects of long unit trains. Impacts to emergency medical transportation (EMT) services and truck freight reliability as well as congestion/delay for the general public.

Other comments:

- Improve ferry system reliability (through redundancy of service and/or equipment.)
- Encourage businesses to aggressively support the Governor's telecommuting order.

ENVIRONMENT

Many comments were received related to oil and coal trains. Concerns include potential environmental damage (and resulting costs) from spills. Commentators expressed concern that the state is not doing

enough to reduce the likelihood of such events, and is not well prepared to mitigate the impacts that would occur if such an event does happen.

There is also concern with current, ongoing environmental pollution from coal dust. This problem is related primarily to loading and unloading operations near terminals, rather than from long-distance shipment of coal.

Additional comments:

- Continue to implement programs or regulations that reduce idling time for all vehicles – ferries, buses, trucks, diesel trains, autos.
- Provide HOV lane access (and related benefits) to eco-friendly cars.
- Reduce/eliminate the barriers to fish passage created by transportation infrastructure. The court-ordered mandate to remove or rehabilitate culverts to improve fish passage needs to be prioritized and followed; funding is needed in order to do so.

LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING INTEGRATION

Participants in the Tri-cities area specifically identified a need for more master planning and better coordination of land use and transportation planning and decisions in the region.

Other comments:

- Work with agricultural producers to reduce distances that food is shipped; provide more support for farm-to-table processes and infrastructure.
- Reduce sprawl through smart growth, by focusing development in areas that are already served by transit, and existing roadway and sidewalk networks. Avoid sprawl-inducing transportation investments.
- Locate more housing choices near improved non-motorized (i.e., bicycle and pedestrian) infrastructure.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Numerous comments were received, from all five open houses, about the need to improve the service area coverage and effectiveness of public transit. Many of these comments singled out elderly and low income groups as particularly in need of improved accessibility and mobility via public transit.

There should be a more clearly defined role for the state in supporting public transit, whether it is more direct funding, assistance with planning and programming, or other forms of support. Existing state programs such as managed express lanes and freeway park-and-ride lots should be coordinated with other investments in public transportation.

Growth in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area, and anticipated increase in the number of Washington residents commuting to Oregon, makes rail transit across the Columbia a priority for some. At the same time, others expressed the opinion that lack of adequate density in Clark County does not support rail transit, or expanded bus transit for that matter.

Due to severely constrained funding, transit operators should focus on maintaining/expanding fixed route service, and spend somewhat less on express and paratransit services; i.e., spend more on general services and less on specialized services that serve smaller target rider groups.

Related comments:

- Seniors need more access to rail transit, not only to buses.

- Safety improvements are particularly important along the routes used by pedestrians and cyclists who are connecting to public transit.
- Need a funding strategy to solve the “first and last mile” challenge and thus make public transit a more feasible option for more trips.

NON-MOTORIZED AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

- More investment in “complete streets” including sidewalks and bike trails, safer routes to schools.
- Additional bicycle access across the Columbia between Vancouver and Portland.
- Safety improvements for non-motorized travel, including on routes used to access public transit.
- Improve enforcement of traffic laws for bicyclists.
- Invest more in regional airports.

PUBLIC HEALTH

- Access to health services is a big issue for small towns and rural communities.
- Consider contracting with ride services such as Uber to provide better mobility and access to health care for small or inaccessible population groups at a lower cost, rather than more expensive (per day or year) fixed route service.
- Public health is improved by investments that facilitate and encourage travel by walking and biking for all trip purposes -- work, school, shopping, recreation.
- More effective partnering between transportation and public health agencies would help cities and towns become more bike/ped friendly and would lead to improved public health.

STEWARDSHIP

- Dedicate motor vehicle sales tax entirely to street maintenance.
- Project permitting takes too long; continually evaluate and improve the process.
- Local funding is inadequate for maintenance of existing city and county infrastructure.
- Educate the legislature and the public on the cost and impacts of studded tires; phase out use of studded tires.
- Give more attention to design aesthetics and community context in major transportation projects.