



WTP 2035 VISION AND GOALS UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

This White Paper presents a draft updated Vision Statement for the Washington Transportation Plan 2035. It includes information gathered from a variety of sources to support development of the updated Vision Statement and numerous associated themes that should be reflected in new strategies and recommended actions in WTP 2035.

While the updated WTP 2035 will likely be organized around the same transportation goal framework as previous WTP 2030 (the six transportation policy goals outlined in RCW 47.04.280) the overall vision for the plan should be revisited and updated to ensure that it reflects accomplishments to date, current and emerging trends, and any new priorities that have been identified up to this point through WTP outreach and research tasks.

We initiated this assessment of the WTP 2035 Vision Statement by reviewing a sizeable number of state and regional plans and policy documents compiled since 2010, when WTP 2030 was adopted. We continued the discussion with the WTP Steering Committee and the Transportation Commission, and engaged a diverse Advisory Group to obtain a broader perspective on emerging priorities. In April, the WTP project team and Commission conducted four regional stakeholder listening sessions around the state, as well as a discussion session with Washington State University students in Pullman, to tap further into local transportation issues and priorities. This paper summarizes the relevant findings of these various investigations and presents an updated Vision Statement in Section 4, below.

1. Existing WTP 2030 Vision Statement

1.1. WTP 2030 Vision Statement and Policy Goals

WTP 2030 included the following statement to set an overarching long-term vision for Washington State's transportation system:

“By 2030, Washington’s transportation network connects people and communities, fostering commerce and operating seamlessly across boundaries and modes as an environmentally and financially sustainable system.”

The Washington Transportation Plan update of 2010, *WTP 2030*, is organized around the six statutory transportation policy goals in RCW 47.04.280. The State Legislature added *Economic Vitality* to the previously existing goals in 2010, reflecting the growing recognition of the role of transportation in supporting economic activity, and the importance of continued investment in transportation infrastructure in preserving and improving Washington’s economic vitality and competitiveness in an increasingly global market. These six policy goals are:

Economic Vitality: To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy

Preservation: To maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services

Safety: To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system

Mobility: To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State

Environment: To enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment

Stewardship: To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system

While the six policy goals are shared statewide, the implementation strategies to make the goals a reality may vary across the state. As the Commission views it, there is overlap between the transportation policy goals, and many strategies easily fit under more than one policy goal.

1.2. Foundational Themes and Strategic Drivers

In addition to this Vision Statement, WTP 2030 identified several important ideas that characterize the most critical transportation policy issues at the time. There was substantial consensus across the wide range of stakeholders and public that provided input to the plan for three "Foundational Themes" which describe the fundamental challenges and aspirations for state transportation policy:

Need for Revenue. Not only is there a need for a more stable, long-term funding mechanism than the motor fuel tax, additional revenue is essential to keep pace with the state's population growth and economic objectives. While user fees are the most appropriate funding mechanisms in some cases, they are not necessarily the best or most efficient way to pay for expansion and maintenance of the state-wide transportation system.

Integrated, Multimodal System. Washington's transportation system should function as an integrated network, with better connections between modes and across political and geographic jurisdictions. State transportation policies and plans should reflect a system-wide view that integrates transportation networks and services, for both passenger travel and goods movement.

Preservation and Maintenance must be the state's top priority. Maintaining the capacity, condition and reliability of the existing transportation system is critical to economic health and quality of life.

In 2014, these foundational themes all remain relevant and have been borne out in the discussions with stakeholders around the state. Washington's maintenance and preservation backlog remains significant, and multimodal integration is not yet a reality for many users, particularly those living outside of the most populous urbanized areas. Even with a new source of revenue, system integration and preservation issues are likely to be important themes for many years. And regardless of the presence or absence of a new state transportation revenue package, the policy-level approach to

funding must acknowledge the importance of accountability for more efficient and cost-effective utilization of those resources that are available.

In addition to these three Foundational Themes, WTP 2030 identified five major influences, or “Strategic Drivers,” that reflect the current political, policy, and economic environment that existed when the plan was developed, and which shaped WTP 2030 strategies and recommended actions:

Transportation Policy should support and reinforce other state policy objectives by embracing goals, principles, and policies that support broad policy outcomes for the state beyond the transportation system itself.

The relationship between land use and transportation is key. Demand for travel changes in relation to the residential, commercial, industrial, and other land uses that provide the reason for movement. The availability of transportation capacity and accessibility in turn often influences land use plans and development.

One size solution does not fit all. WTP 2030 recognizes that transportation needs and challenges vary across the state. While the Plan takes a systems approach to addressing statewide needs, local jurisdictions and agencies should approach local planning and decision making in a way that best meets the unique needs of their communities within this statewide framework.

It is critical to educate, inform and reach out to the public. The success of the WTP in guiding future transportation decisions depends on public understanding of the importance of transportation to the state’s well-being. Broad community outreach efforts are needed to raise awareness about the critical role that transportation plays in our economy and our daily lives, and of the importance of continued reinvestment in the system.

Continue the evolution toward performance-based planning. The public wants to know that a given project achieved the desired outcomes and that scarce transportation funds are spent wisely. Regular reporting on implementation actions and results will help build support for further necessary investment.

These strategic drivers are as relevant in 2014 as they were in 2010, and the WTP 2035 update will reflect these factors in the identification of updated strategies and actions that reflect changes in the political, policy, and economic context and climate since 2010.

2. Accomplishments, Conditions and Trends

The updated WTP should reflect recent accomplishments as well as changing conditions and trends since WTP 2030 was adopted in late 2010.

2.1. Significant Accomplishments Since WTP 2030 Adoption

The lingering economic recession and lack of adequate funding hindered accomplishment of many of the recommended actions contained in WTP 2030. However, the following examples illustrate where progress has been made to improve the coverage, efficiency and safety of travel:

- Implementation of strategies to improve freight and passenger transportation safety across all jurisdictions and transportation modes

- Construction of additional separated rail/highway grade crossings
- Passenger rail service improvements
- Replacing the Keller Ferry
- Partial implementation of “Next Generation” aviation technologies to improve efficiency and safety of aircraft routing and reduce in-air aircraft emissions
- Leveraging other emerging technologies to improve efficiency in surface transportation
- Expanding High Occupancy Toll lanes
- Reducing transportation infrastructure runoff and storm water impacts
- Promoting “Complete Streets” and Safe Routes to Schools policies
- Expanded charging infrastructure for plug-in vehicles

Despite these particular successes, the Advisory Group and Stakeholder Roundtable outreach process reveals that there is still much to be accomplished to more fully realize the numerous strategies of WTP 2030. In some instances, increased demand on the transportation system may be negating or even outpacing the rate of system improvements. For example, although there continue to be new grade separated rail/highway crossings each year, there has also been substantial growth in the number of unit trains hauling energy and agricultural products, increasing the frequency and duration of vehicular delays at the remaining at-grade crossings on major east-west rail lines.

2.2. Existing Conditions and Trends

A separate report on current transportation system conditions has been prepared to support analysis of future needs, and to guide development of updated strategies and actions (Technical Memorandum #2, Existing Conditions and Trends, May 2014.) While Washington’s transportation system is not dramatically different in 2014 than it was in 2010, there are some notable changes in usage as well as some persistent areas of stagnation. A few observations stand out:

- Usage of most all components of the transportation system is increasing as the state recovers from a long recession. Passenger volumes are up on highways and public transit, and freight tonnage is up on highway, rail, barge and air modes. Anecdotally, transit operators note (and passengers concur) they are unable to provide enough peak period service in high-demand corridors to avoid severe crowding.
- Several very significant capital expansion and replacement projects are underway, promising to maintain or improve future mobility on the system, but also consuming a large percentage of available funding and financing capacity. Generally, there is insufficient discretionary funding available to address both known and unanticipated future transportation needs, as too large a percentage of authorized funding streams are committed to specific projects/programs or to debt service. Known long-term capital replacement needs on the Washington State Ferry system remain less than fully funded.

- Spending on essential operations, maintenance and preservation of the system continues to lag behind most estimates of need. This is most apparent in roadway maintenance and public transportation service; private-sector investment in freight system capacity and maintenance is on the increase.

Additional more detailed aspects of current conditions and recent trends are summarized here, organized according to the WTP policy goals:

Mobility

- By 2010, total travel by motor vehicles (vehicle miles of travel, or VMT) had returned to pre-recession levels.
- Meanwhile there has been a continuing slide since 2010, in both VMT per capita and motor vehicle fuel consumption per capita. This suggests that the amount of travel by each individual is on the decline, but that decline is being offset by population growth.
- Available data indicate that most of the net increase in Washington’s public transportation ridership (from 2009 to 2012) has come via investment in light rail transit (LRT) and streetcars, in those areas that have such modes, and not in fixed route bus transit. Light rail transit trips more than doubled in the period 2009-2012 due to service extension, and commuter rail ridership was up 12%, while conventional urban bus ridership was flat over the same period. Declining revenue for capital-intensive modes such as LRT raises questions about the sustainability of this trend. More recent data indicate that bus transit ridership is increasing in select areas since 2012, and it is likely that urban bus systems will continue to require significant capital reinvestment and operating subsidy to meet growing demand and remain competitive with other modes.

Economic Vitality

- Annual growth of employment in the state’s freight-dependent industries was back in positive territory in 2011 after three successive years of decline; earnings from those same industries was strongly positive in 2010-11 after several years of flat or negative growth.
- Exports, an important part of the state economy, are up over 50% in dollar value since 2010.
- Freight shipments by rail are expected to double between 2010 and 2035, raising the issues of future rail system reliability and safety.

Preservation

- Physical roadway condition deteriorated somewhat overall in the state, with the percentage of state-managed roads with pavement quality rated “good or very good” falling from 83% to 76% over the period 2008-2012. County arterials saw a similar drop, from 94% to 89% rated “fair or better.”
- Bridge conditions were more constant over the same period; both state- and county-maintained bridges were essentially unchanged over the period 2008-2012, at 87% and 84% in good condition, respectively.

Safety

- Total traffic-related fatalities continued the steady decline demonstrated since 2006. However, there has been an increase in fatalities involving motorcyclists and pedestrians, reflecting the growing popularity of these modes.

Environment

- The transportation sector continues to be Washington's largest consumer of energy, accounting for 44% of total annual energy usage. It is also the least energy-efficient sector, generating 55% of the state's waste energy (2009.)
- Transportation is also the largest sector producer of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) at 32% of total state GHG emissions.

Stewardship

- Motor fuel taxes still account for about 53% of state transportation revenues, with license, permit, and driver-related fees making up another 28%. All remaining sources account for less than 20% of funding for the state system in 2013, as they did in 2009.
- Localities are now picking up a larger share of the transportation tab through property taxes and other local sources. Local funding for public transit, including fares, increased by 23% over the period 2008-2012, while combined federal and state revenues for transit fell 6%. Local sources now account for 85% of public transit funding.

3. Emerging Themes and Priorities for WTP 2035

Several sources were consulted to identify changes in policy outlook or priorities that have emerged since the WTP 2030 update. A review of relevant planning and policy documents was conducted to assess emerging state and regional priorities (Technical Memorandum #1, Document Review and Synthesis, January 2014.) In addition, a first phase of outreach and involvement with stakeholders was initiated with a broad range of transportation professionals, service providers, system customers, and others, to further tap into their sense of emerging trends and themes that should suggest the highest priority issues to be addressed in WTP 2035. This effort included two meetings thus far with the WTP Advisory Group, four Stakeholder Roundtable listening sessions held across the state in April, 2014, and a discussion session with Washington State University students in Pullman.¹

3.1. Synthesis of State and Regional Policy and Planning Documents

A review and synthesis was conducted of selected statewide, regional, and local transportation planning and policy documents that have become available since the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) 2030 was approved in 2010. The high-level findings of that synthesis include the following:

¹ A summary of the roundtable sessions including a list of participants can be found on the WTP 2035 web site, 'wtp2035.com'

Statewide planning priorities include preservation and maintenance, sustainable funding, safety, and protecting the state’s transportation system against the effects of climate change.

- **Preservation and Maintenance.** Recent state documents such as the 2012 task force report *Connecting Washington* observe that both regular maintenance and long-term preservation of highways, bridges, and other infrastructure, including public transit vehicles and ferries, remain top priorities, yet are underfunded.
- **Safety.** While Washington has made significant progress in recent years to improve transportation system safety, the *Strategic Highway Safety Plan “Target Zero” 2013 Update* calls for more coordination and collaboration with partners to continue progress towards the State’s aspirational goal of zero deaths on the State’s transportation system. Emerging concerns include the increasing conflict between motor vehicles and the growing number of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists sharing the roadway.
- **Energy and Environment.** Energy conservation, reducing emissions, and protecting the State’s transportation system against the effects of climate change are all considerations of growing importance at the State level. The *Washington State Energy Policy* underscores the need to reduce transportation’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions not solely through travel demand management strategies but also by improving energy efficiency for all key passenger and freight transportation modes. The Governor’s recent executive order² calls for a wide array of strategies and actions to increase efficiency and reduce both energy costs and GHG emissions from transportation, including market pricing mechanisms.
- **Freight Mobility.** Supporting the broader goals of economic growth and environmental preservation through strategic investment in freight transportation infrastructure is at the core of WSDOT’s Freight Mobility Plan. However, highway capacity for goods movement is essentially stagnant, and freight shipments by rail are expected to double between 2010 and 2035, raising the issues of future system reliability and safety. The understandable desire to maximize freight mobility must be balanced with other goals of environment, public health and safety.

Regional priorities. Several state-level summaries and synopses were consulted to obtain a high-level view of regional priorities. The State Transportation Commission’s *Regional Transportation Priority Projects* report summarizes priorities as reported by most of the state’s MPOs and RTPOs. System preservation and maintenance is the most commonly cited top priority, followed by freight mobility/economic development, safety, and improved alternative transportation choices.

- **Preservation and Maintenance.** Due to declining revenues relative to need, counties and cities are increasingly challenged with the cost of simply maintaining and preserving their existing infrastructure. Sustainable funding sources are needed, such as a dedicated source established at the state level and directed to local preservation needs.
- **Public Transportation.** The 2013 WSDOT State Summary of Public Transportation suggests that most of the net increase in public transportation ridership from 2009 to 2012 has resulted from investment in light rail transit (LRT) and streetcars, and not in fixed route

² Executive Order 14-04, Washington Carbon Pollution Reduction and Clean Energy Action

bus transit. Declining revenue for capital-intensive modes such as LRT raises questions about the sustainability of this trend. Traditional urban bus transit systems will continue to require significant capital reinvestment and operating subsidy to remain competitive. More aggressive operational and transportation pricing strategies may be necessary components of a comprehensive urban transportation program.

- **Other Regional Priorities.** There are many differences between different regions of the state, with resulting variation in priorities. In the Puget Sound region there is an emphasis on expanded public transportation and tolling of roads and bridges to accommodate growing demand, generate needed revenue, and encourage more economically and environmentally efficient travel behavior. Rural areas cite the critical importance of programs that provide connectivity to the rest of the state, such as all-weather roads, rural transit, and passenger air service. Ferry service is of course a lifeline to several sub-regions of the larger Puget Sound basin. Agricultural product transportation and tourism are disproportionately important to the local economy in some areas.

Tribal priorities. The 2012 Washington Tribal-State Conference identified a number of priorities for Tribal-state cooperation to achieve better outcomes. Several of the priorities have to do with improved coordination around various funding and grant programs. Transportation safety and public transit are two specific areas where improvement in the amount of available funding and the efficiency of expenditure of those funds will help to better address Tribal transportation needs and improve economic development opportunities.

Business priorities. Business and industry groups such as the Association of Washington Business and state and regional Chambers of Commerce seek improved efficiency in expenditure of existing funding and greater accountability for results through performance measurement approaches. There is a preference for prioritizing investments in system preservation /maintenance and goods movement infrastructure. Direct user charges, such as tolling, and local option taxes that increase the nexus between expenditure and benefits, are preferred over broad statewide tax increases to fund future investment needs.

3.2. Advisory Group Guidance

The 18-member WTP Advisory Group convened in January and again in March to discuss priorities for their wide-ranging constituencies which include state agencies, offices and boards such as Commerce, Ecology, Financial Management, and Freight Mobility; special interests such as private businesses, public health and alternative transportation modes; several RTPOs; Washington State Tribes; and commissions and associations representing ports, cities counties, and transit operators. The following messages emerged from the second meeting:

- It is desirable for the Commission and WSDOT to develop a single, statewide plan that is comprehensive in scope and conveys the state's priorities for the transportation system, yet is flexible enough to be relevant to all regions and jurisdictions, including Washington's Tribes.
- It is important to clarify, and increase where appropriate, the State's role in critical mobility service including public transit, aviation, freight, and non-motorized transportation.

- The WTP should provide policy direction that results in selection and funding of projects and programs that support the full range of top-level state policy objectives including those related to the economy, environment, and public health.
- All transportation stakeholder groups must keep up with changing demographics and evolving travel choices to ensure the future safety of all users, for example, providing safe pedestrian and cyclist access to public transit stops, improving heavily-used at grade freight rail crossings, etc.
- Both state and regional transportation agencies need to partner more closely with research centers and private industry to stay up with rapidly-evolving technologies that can improve system capacity, safety and efficiency, and help manage the cost of infrastructure expansion.

Funding issues are of particular interest to the Advisory Group members, who acknowledge the need to better inform and educate the public about the links between transportation, economic vitality, and quality of life, in order to successfully make the case for adequate, sustainable funding. At the same time, they also recognize that it is important for all transportation agencies to be accountable for expenditure of funds, and to report clearly what has been accomplished and what benefits are being realized.

- The WTP must not only make the case for adequate, sustainable sources of transportation funding, but must also identify a transportation investment *strategy* that supports economic vitality, environmental sustainability, improved public health and other high-level policy objectives in order to generate broad support among many different constituencies.
- The State must improve accountability for implementation decisions and transportation expenditures in order to keep the WTP relevant to stakeholders and system users at multiple jurisdictional levels. There is support for application of performance-based planning and management to help improve accountability.

3.3. Stakeholder Roundtables

Four regional listening sessions, as well as discussion session with Washington State University students in Pullman, were hosted to elicit views about transportation priorities from a broad range of regional and local interests. Many of the issues raised by participants are similar to those identified via the document synthesis and the Advisory Group discussions, but they were more predominantly local in context and outlook. Following are the most significant themes that emerged from all four of the roundtables. The more complete findings, presented in the “Summary of Stakeholder Roundtables” that may be found at the WTP 2035 website, wtp2035.org, include a number of additional important issues that are more unique to particular regions of the state.

- **Funding.** The gap between available funding and needs was most frequently cited as the main issue to be resolved, and developing a sustainable source of funding for transportation projects and programs is a top priority among regional stakeholders. There is no obvious agreement on any single source of revenue, but there is support for employing a diverse range of multiple revenue sources – e.g., gas tax, mileage-based fees, vehicle registration fees, tolls, passenger fares, employer-operated or -subsidized transit, etc. - to lessen the dependence on any single source.

- **Equity.** Equity of impacts and benefits of transportation funding is also important to regional stakeholders. Funding sources need to be not only stable and adequate, but funding mechanisms must fairly distribute costs and benefits. More flexibility in use of funding is important to allow jurisdictions to direct resources to the areas of most need.
- **Maintenance and Preservation.** Maintaining and preserving the existing transportation infrastructure is another top priority, extending beyond roads and bridges to include transit vehicles and other system components. The lack of dedicated funding, and diversion of funds to capital projects, are cited as chief factors contributing to declining system condition.
- **Integrated System.** Regional stakeholders feel the state needs to more broadly support the continuing evolution to an integrated, multimodal transportation system for people and freight. Expansion of multimodal services is needed to improve mobility options and access to services for all populations — urban, suburban and rural. The state’s role in planning and funding these services should be larger than it currently is.
- **Active Transportation.** Participants noted the growing reliance on bicycling and walking, not just for recreation but for utility trips – work, education, health care, shopping, etc. There is a link between housing affordability and transportation options, and the availability of safe, connected transit, biking and walking options may influence housing choices and create value for communities. Safety is a significant concern surrounding the growth in active transportation. Solutions involve not only infrastructure design issues, but also attitudinal adjustments and improved awareness among drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike.
- **Public Health.** The impacts of transportation on public health and well-being, pro and con, are a statewide concern. There are numerous facets to this relationship, including vehicle emissions, direct health benefits of active transportation, physical safety, etc. Transportation also plays a critical role by providing access to health care, employment, education, social opportunities and other activities that improve health and well-being.
- **State and Regional Collaboration.** Stakeholders in each regional session commented about the relationship between local/regional transportation planners and providers, and WSDOT. In addition to the desire for a larger role for the State in funding of public transportation, participants called for greater recognition of the diverse needs across the state’s communities, such as improving rural roadway conditions, and addressing the basic transportation needs of low-income families who are moving to suburban/rural areas to take advantage of lower housing costs.

4. Recommended Vision Statement for WTP 2035

Based on all the foregoing information gleaned from official documents, transportation professionals on the Advisory Group, and stakeholders from around the state, we reaffirmed the significance of all the existing elements of the existing WTP 2030 Vision. The existing Vision already references environmental and financial sustainability, which address the more recent emphasis on cost-effectiveness and accountability for expenditures. It also refers to commerce and seamless operations, reflecting the continued emphasis on economic vitality and the need for better system integration for freight and

passenger travel. What we have added are subtle allusions to two additional emerging issues: the changing face of transportation safety, and the desire across the state for greater travel options to improve personal mobility:

“By 2035, Washington’s transportation system safely connects people and communities, fostering commerce, operating seamlessly across boundaries, and providing travel options to achieve an environmentally and financially sustainable system.”

The essential themes behind the proposed WTP 2035 Vision mirror the results of research and outreach as described above, i.e.:

- Improved safety and security for all transportation modes and users, on the complete system including state, local and Tribal infrastructure
- Economic vitality supported by efficient freight and passenger mobility
- Jurisdictional and modal inter-connectivity to reduce obstacles to multimodal travel and increase the number of realistic travel choices for any given trip
- Equity of mobility and accessibility to all user groups, and equitable distribution of funding costs
- Environmental sustainability, including reduction of system impacts to the state’s natural environment and reduced contribution to the broader problem of GHG emissions
- Sustainable funding, providing a source or sources of a stable, long term revenue stream which allows a more cost-effective, proactive approach to system maintenance, preservation and eventual rehabilitation or replacement of critical infrastructure including transit vehicles and ferries
- Improved integration of land use policy in the state transportation planning process, and clear linkages between WTP 2035 and the state’s Growth Management Act
- Anticipation and accommodation of Washington’s changing demographic and socioeconomic picture, with all of its implications for changing travel patterns and preferences
- Preparation for impacts and benefits of evolving technology through more rapid adoption of innovative technologies and direct support for applied research and development for cost-effective proposals to address future transportation needs

The Vision Statement, as well as these essential themes, will be further expanded and described through the development of updated strategies and actions to be included in the draft WTP 2035.