

Initial Citizen Committee Recommendations

Goal Statement V. Sustainable Transportation

The Skagit County that we envision for 2060 will be a unique part of the landscape between the Cascade mountains and the Salish Sea. We will accommodate new residents, but our vistas will be much like they are today because most of our new residents will reside within existing communities, and a pro-active approach to transportation issues will minimize our need for road construction that negatively impacts all of the natural elements we are striving to preserve. Providing transportation choices is also an essential element of planning for affordable housing and addressing the needs of special populations for whom driving is not an option.

We call on the Skagit community, and policy makers and transportation funders at the statewide level, to envision and implement a sustainable transportation system for the next 50 years and beyond.

1. **Increase intercity passenger rail service in the Northwest Washington region, as is currently being discussed by Federal and State agencies, the province of British Columbia, Amtrak, WSDOT, and the Whatcom and Skagit Councils of Governments. ***
 - a. Increased passenger rail service would be a perfect complement to Mount Vernon's downtown redevelopment plan, by bringing increased numbers of people to downtown condos and other residences, hotels, restaurants, theaters, shops, the farmers market, and other activities.
 - b. It would also serve the interests of local residents who work outside the county, people in the region who want to enjoy regional activities without the hassle of city driving, and local businesses who would benefit from more tourism.
 - c. Explore the possibility of returning historic rail corridors to active rail use, for example, the Tommy Thompson Trail and the Cascade Trail. It may be a long time before population numbers and densities could support in-county rail service, but it is worth noting that local rail service existed in the County previously, and may play a role again in the long-term future.
2. **Encourage more compact urban development, and more clustered rural development, to facilitate more efficient transportation.** Public transit is much more cost effective and efficient to provide in compact communities. Residential densities of about 7 dwelling units per acre generally can support basic bus service, while densities of 15 units per acre or higher are needed to support more frequent service.¹ As that better transit network is built, along a system of major hubs and corridors, it can then help to shape future land-use patterns that are mutually reinforcing.
3. **Place greater emphasis on non-motorized transportation, including more and better bike lanes and pedestrian facilities built into the road network, as well as a more developed system of nonmotorized trails.**

¹ Transportation Research Board (TRB), 2004.

DRAFT – FOR DISCUSSION ONLY– SUBJECT TO REVISION AND ADDITION

We have learned the hard way that unless we specifically plan for sidewalks, bike lanes and bike paths, and trails, these features will likely be missing in the end.

- a. The Skagit Council of Governments (or other regional planning entity, consisting of a broad and inclusive range of stakeholders) should look for appropriate opportunities to integrate non-motorized transportation routes and networks with the existing and proposed open space network. This should be done in a cooperative, voluntary manner that enhances mobility and respects community values and individual property rights.
 - b. Within Urban Growth Areas, open space should emphasize public access and integrate seamlessly with non-motorized transportation. Open space adjacent to UGAs that is appropriate for public access should be directly linked to open space corridors within the UGA to create a contiguous network.
 - c. Road standards should be modified to improve safety for bicyclists, particularly on designated bicycle routes.
4. **Explore and embrace innovative transit options.** Although we do have small buses that serve rural areas, this service needs to be much more frequent for most people to view these as an alternative to cars.
- a. For long, skinny corridors such as SR 20, explore a system such as the colectivos that run south of Cancun and in other parts of Latin America. Colectivos are fleets of passenger vans that run with high frequency along the highway.
 - b. Creative Options Everywhere: Run colectivos around our towns; consider Bus Rapid Transit as an alternative to high speed rail; consider river taxis from La Conner to at least Mount Vernon and Burlington; work directly with employers to find ways to reduce commute trips for workers; create options for shoppers such as shuttle buses or fixed-cost taxi service; set up mini park-n-rides in rural areas to simplify use of public transit; provide rain protection at bus stops; explore possible rail-to-trail and trail-to-rail conversions; require serious attention to transportation alternatives in all development plans.
5. **Preserve and enhance our ferry connections to the islands and the international ferry service to Vancouver Island.** This service is important for our tourism economy and the goods and service providers here that supply the islands.
6. **Protect existing airport facilities from encroaching incompatible land uses that could limit their future aircraft operations.** Skagit County has three paved airports, Skagit Regional at Bayview, Anacortes, and Concrete. These facilities are important to the current and future economics of Skagit County. These facilities should be protected from encroaching incompatible land uses that could limit their future aircraft operations.
7. **Preserve our current navigable waterways into the future.** Swinomish Channel is dependent on periodic dredging for the safe passage of commercial and recreational vessels, a large number of which are based in La Conner. Every effort should be made to preserve this navigable channel for the economic health of our region and the safety of the vessels that transit our county.