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Subject: FW: Comment on Comprehensive Plan update, Transportation Element
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From: Kit Rawson [<mailto:krawson50@gmail.com>]
Sent: Thursday, October 29, 2015 5:23 PM
To: KirkJohnson
Subject: Comment on Comprehensive Plan update, Transportation Element

October 29, 2015

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I appreciated the informative work session on the comprehensive plan update held at Big Lake Fire Department on October 27, 2015. I made several oral comments at the session, which were recorded accurately in the flip chart notes. However, I would like to briefly summarize some of my key points to be sure they are in the record.

Here I have split out just my comment on the transportation element in case you are sorting comments by topic. I was unable to attend the work session in March on this element because I was out of the country visiting my daughter who was volunteering in Africa at the time.

My comments concern the non-motorized transportation part of the transportation element. The presentation clearly stated that the state Growth Management Act requires a pedestrian and bicycle component to be included in the transportation element. You also stated that Skagit County is working on securing funding for a number of bicycle and pedestrian projects in the county. I support both of these things, but we have to go much further.

Non-motorized transportation can no longer be regarded as an add-on done solely because the state requires some pedestrian and bicycle projects. Rather, walking and cycling must be seen as an integral component of an overall transportation plan for Skagit County. It is not appropriate to simply measure the fractions of trips that are taken by car versus non-motorized means and build infrastructure to maintain that ratio. The result of this approach will, of course, be no increase in the use of non-motorized means for getting around. A better, and more appropriate, approach is to set goals for the numbers of trips that are taken by non-motorized means and to set those goals at much higher levels than are seen today. Then infrastructure, housing patterns, commercial building design, and many other aspects of our built environment can be built appropriate for these goals. Such an approach would be much more likely to result in a shift to more non-motorized trips.

You have received a lot of other testimony documenting the human and environmental health benefits of increased non-motorized transportation, so I won't repeat those points, although I agree with them. However, it has to be clear that to achieve any meaningful increase in the amount of non-motorized transportation in Skagit County, non-motorized transportation must be an integral part of the transportation plan, not a separate add-on. I spoke briefly on the 27th about doing my errands around the Mount Vernon-Burlington area on my bicycle and how some aspects of this work well while others are very difficult and dangerous because of roads being designed for cars without much thought given to other means of getting around. There was not time at that session to go into the specific areas where things are difficult, but there are many. To get to proper inclusion of non-motorized transportation in the overall county transportation plan, it will be important to assemble information on the kinds of trips that people can take using non-motorized means and what is required to make those trips safe. We already do that for motorists, and cyclists and pedestrians deserve the same consideration.

I would be willing to help with any efforts to appropriately include non-motorized transportation as an essential part of the transportation element of the revised Comprehensive Plan.

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