

# SKAGIT COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT UPDATE

## Summary of Transportation Element Requirements, Transportation Situation, and Key Questions

### INTRODUCTION

Skagit County's 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update will include an updated Transportation Element. This summary document presents Transportation Element requirements under the Growth Management Act (GMA), some early findings regarding County transportation conditions countywide. It also provides some key questions the Planning Commission and public can think about ahead of the March 17, 2015 meeting where the Transportation Element will be discussed.

### TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT CONTENTS

#### Transportation Element Requirements

A transportation element provides an inventory of the county or city's current transportation system, a forecast of future transportation needs, and goals and policies to promote an affordable, safe, efficient and integrated multi-modal transportation system. The GMA goal for transportation is:

*Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans. (RCW 36.70a.020(3))*

The specific GMA content requirements for a transportation element are found at RCW 36.70a.070(6), excerpted here:

*A transportation element that implements, and is consistent with, the land use element.*

*(a) The transportation element shall include the following subelements:*

*(i) Land use assumptions used in estimating travel;*

*(ii) Estimated traffic impacts to state-owned transportation facilities resulting from land use assumptions...;*

*(iii) Facilities and services needs, including:*

*(A) An inventory of air, water, and ground transportation facilities and services, including transit alignments and general aviation airport facilities ...;*

*(B) Level of service standards for all locally owned arterials and transit routes to serve as a gauge to judge performance of the system. These standards should be regionally coordinated;*

*(C) For state-owned transportation facilities, level of service standards for highways, as prescribed in chapters 47.06 and 47.80 RCW, to gauge the performance of the system...;*

*(D) Specific actions and requirements for bringing into compliance locally owned transportation facilities or services that are below an established level of service standard;*

(E) Forecasts of traffic for at least ten years based on the adopted land use plan to provide information on the location, timing, and capacity needs of future growth;

(F) Identification of state and local system needs to meet current and future demands....;

(iv) Finance, including:

(A) An analysis of funding capability to judge needs against probable funding resources;

(B) A multiyear financing plan based on the needs identified in the comprehensive plan, the appropriate parts of which shall serve as the basis for the six-year street, road, or transit program required by ...RCW 36.81.121 for counties, and RCW 35.58.2795 for public transportation systems....;

(C) If probable funding falls short of meeting identified needs, a discussion of how additional funding will be raised, or how land use assumptions will be reassessed to ensure that level of service standards will be met;

(v) Intergovernmental coordination efforts, including an assessment of the impacts of the transportation plan and land use assumptions on the transportation systems of adjacent jurisdictions;

(vi) Demand-management strategies;

(vii) Pedestrian and bicycle component to include collaborative efforts to identify and designate planned improvements for pedestrian and bicycle facilities and corridors that address and encourage enhanced community access and promote healthy lifestyles.

(b) After adoption of the comprehensive plan by jurisdictions required to plan or who choose to plan under RCW 36.70A.040, local jurisdictions must adopt and enforce ordinances which prohibit development approval if the development causes the level of service on a locally owned transportation facility to decline below the standards adopted in the transportation element of the comprehensive plan, unless transportation improvements or strategies to accommodate the impacts of development are made concurrent with the development...

(c) The transportation element described in this subsection (6), the six-year plans required by RCW 35.77.010 for cities, RCW 36.81.121 for counties, and RCW 35.58.2795 for public transportation systems, and the ten-year investment program required by RCW 47.05.030 for the state, must be consistent. (RCW 36.70A.070(6))

## Skagit County Transportation Element Status

The County's current transportation element contains goals, policies, and a profile. Current goals include:

*GOAL A: Plan and maintain a safe and efficient system for the movement of people and goods in partnership, where appropriate, with the Skagit Council of Governments.*

*GOAL A1 – SYSTEM MANAGEMENT: Maintain and improve the County roadway system consistent with the growth management strategies of the Land Use Element, and respect the unique environmental and economic character of the area.*

*GOAL A2 – LEVEL OF SERVICE: Establish level of service standards for the County's road system to gauge the performance of the system and determine areas where transportation improvements are required.*

*GOAL A3 – PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: Work with other agencies and jurisdictions to coordinate a safe, accessible, and integrated system of public transportation.*

*GOAL A4 – PASSENGER RAIL: Support passenger rail service to and through Skagit County as an important element of a balanced transportation system.*

*GOAL A5 – FERRY SERVICE: Work to maintain county and state ferry services as an important element of the transportation network.*

*GOAL A6 – NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION: Provide a safe and efficient network of trails and bikeways, including both on- and off-road facilities that link populated areas of the County with important travel destinations.*

*Achieve high standards in meeting the needs of non-motorized users, through appropriate planning, design, construction and maintenance of user-friendly facilities.*

*Increase education, information and traffic enforcement efforts associated with non-motorized transportation as a means of lowering collision and injury rates associated with these modes.*

*GOAL A7 – FREIGHT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Support economic development goals by providing adequate air, rail and surface freight handling routes and facilities throughout the County transportation system.*

*GOAL A8 – TOURISM AND RECREATION: Support the promotion of tourism, recreation, and special events through the County transportation system.*

*GOAL A9 – SCENIC HIGHWAYS: Support the preservation and enhancement of scenic highways and historic, archeological and cultural resources within Skagit County.*

*GOAL A10 – TRAFFIC SAFETY: Provide a safe travel environment for county residents and visitors in all modes of transportation.*

*Recognize public safety, education, and law enforcement as integral to the development of non-motorized transportation opportunities in Skagit County.*

*GOAL A11 – ROAD MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING: Develop a systematic approach for monitoring and maintaining the transportation system in a cost-effective manner.*

*Provide a high level of maintenance to the County transportation system.*

*GOAL A12 – SYSTEM MANAGEMENT: Increase the efficiency of the existing transportation system before major capital expenditures are made.*

*GOAL A13 – LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT: Incorporate transportation goals, policies, and strategies into all County land use decisions.*

*GOAL A14 – CONCURRENCY: Ensure that suitable mitigation measures for addressing the impacts of growth are fair and equitable, and that transportation impacts at the project and system levels are mitigated concurrently with the project.*

*GOAL A15 – IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION: To jointly plan, prioritize, and finance transportation improvements with federal, state, regional, and municipal partners for the greatest public benefit.*

*GOAL A16 – CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: Integrate the Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the 20-year long range transportation needs assessment with the Capital Facilities Plan consistent with the goals and policies of this Comprehensive Plan.*

The current Transportation Element profile was developed in 2005. A key background document used in developing the current Transportation Element profile is the Transportation Systems Plan (TSP) which was last updated in 2003. For the 2016 update the County anticipates replacing the TSP with a Transportation Technical Appendix that will be reviewed and adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan; the appendix will support the more abbreviated Transportation Element profile. The Technical Appendix together with the Transportation Profile and Policies will include the background information and analysis necessary to meet the GMA requirements. Several other transportation plans and associated data will be used in developing the updated transportation element including:

- *Skagit-Island Metropolitan & Regional Transportation Plan (MRTP)* Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG), 2010 (In the process of being updated, due to be complete by April 2016))
- *Skagit Regional Non-Motorized Plan*, Skagit Council of Governments, 2015 (In the process of being updated)
- *Washington State Freight and Goods Transportation System 2013 Update*, Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Rail Division, 2014
- *Washington State Freight Mobility Plan*, Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), 2014
- *Washington State Rail Plan*, Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), 2014
- *Skagit County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan*, Skagit County, 2013
- *Island & Skagit Counties Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Update*, Skagit Transit, 2010

Following a review of more recent data and studies, the County intends to review its current Transportation Element Goals and Policies for potential updates to reflect recent and forecast trends.

## CURRENT TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS:

The County is collecting and reviewing data. Preliminarily the data shows the following:

- **Skagit County has grown, but more recently at a slower rate.** The official U.S. Census population for 2010 was 116,901 and in 2014 it equaled 119,500 according to the State Office of Financial Management (OFM). The average annual increase from 2000 to 2010 was 1.3 percent, while for the period between 2010 and 2014 it was about half the rate, at 0.6 percent.
- **County Public Road Inventory Remains Steady.** The County owns and maintains approximately 800 miles of roads. The number of roadway miles by federal functional class (FFC) has remained relatively steady since 2008 and is currently as follows:

**Exhibit 1. Roadway Miles by Federal Functional Class**

<b>Federal Functional Class</b>	<b>Miles</b>
Rural Minor Arterial	9.4
Rural Major Collector	156.6
Rural Minor Collector	153.1
Rural Local Access	373.6
Urban other Principal Arterial	0.5
Urban Minor Arterial	17.6
Urban Collector	13.9
Urban Minor Collector	5.0
Urban Local Access	71.4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>801.0</b>

Source: Skagit County Public Works, 2015

- **County Private Road Inventory.** The County has approximately 275 miles of privately owned and maintained roads.
- **Level of Service Analysis (LOS).** According to the 2013 Concurrency report by Skagit County Public Works the established LOS for County roads is C. The LOS for County Road intersections is D. An LOS of D is acceptable on roads with the following characteristics:
  - Have Annualized Average Daily Traffic (AADT) greater than 7,000 vehicles; and
  - Are NOT federal functionally classified as an 09-Local Access Road; and
  - Are designated as a County Freight and Goods Transportation Systems Route (FGTS).
- **Average Daily Traffic Projected Increases.** Roadway capacity is not expected to be a major issue for the transportation element update. Four roads have Average Daily Traffic (ADT) of over 7,000 vehicles per day in 2014 and two more roads are expected to have at least one segment with ADT over 7,000 vehicles by 2029.

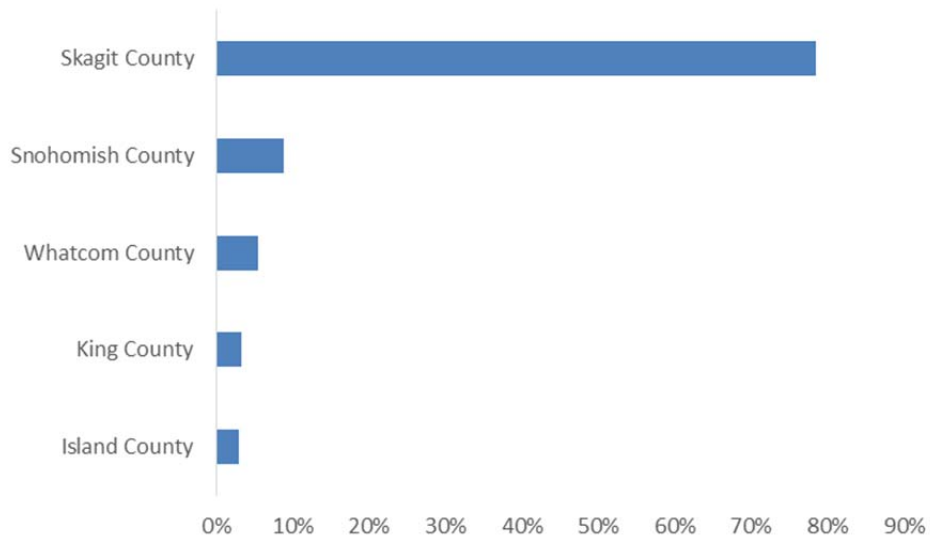
**Exhibit 2. Roads with ADT greater than 7,000 (2014-2029)**

<b>Road</b>	<b>2014 ADT (Highest Segment)</b>	<b>2029 ADT (Projected)</b>	<b>Percentage Increase</b>
Cook Road	14,233	19,156	34.6%
Fir Island Road	9,228	12,420	34.6%
Pioneer Highway	8,935	12,025	34.6%
Bow Hill Road	7,738	10,414	34.6%
McLean Road	6,228	8,328	33.7%
LaConner Whitney Road	5,525	7,436	34.6%

Source: Skagit County Public Works, 2015

- **Skagit Transit Ridership.** Fixed route passenger trips were 644,968 in 2013, an increase of 20,264 or 3.2% from 2011. Ridership is expected to increase to 895,000 passenger trips on fixed routes by 2019, an increase of 38.8% from 2013.
- **Journey to Work and Commuting Trends.** Exhibit 3 shows where Skagit County Residents work and Exhibit 4 shows where Skagit County Workers Live. Approximately 80% of Skagit County residents work in Skagit County. Exhibit 5 shows the number of workers that commute into and out of Skagit County for work along with the people that both live and work in Skagit County.

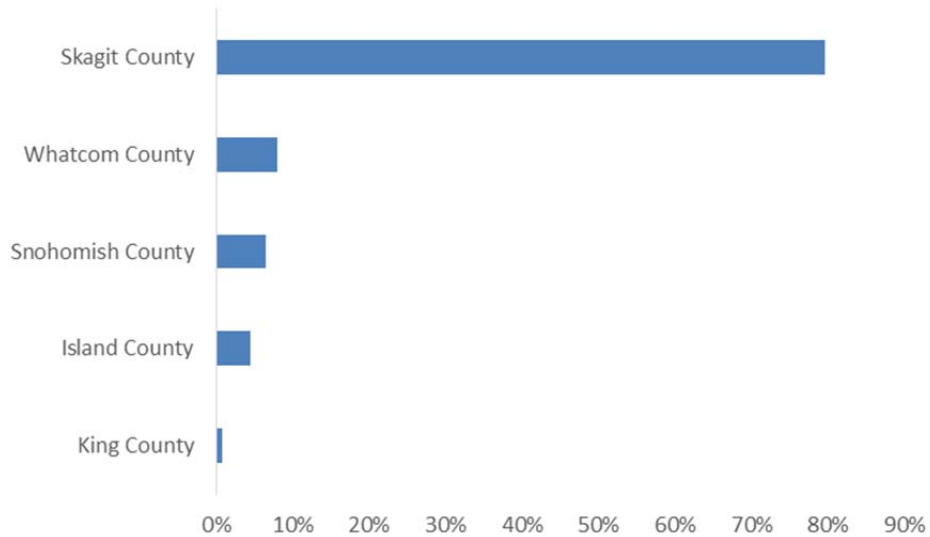
**Exhibit 3. Skagit County Residents' Place of Work**



The percentage of Skagit County residents who work in Skagit County, versus in other nearby counties.

Sources: Census Transportation Planning Products; U.S. Census Decennial Census (1970-2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

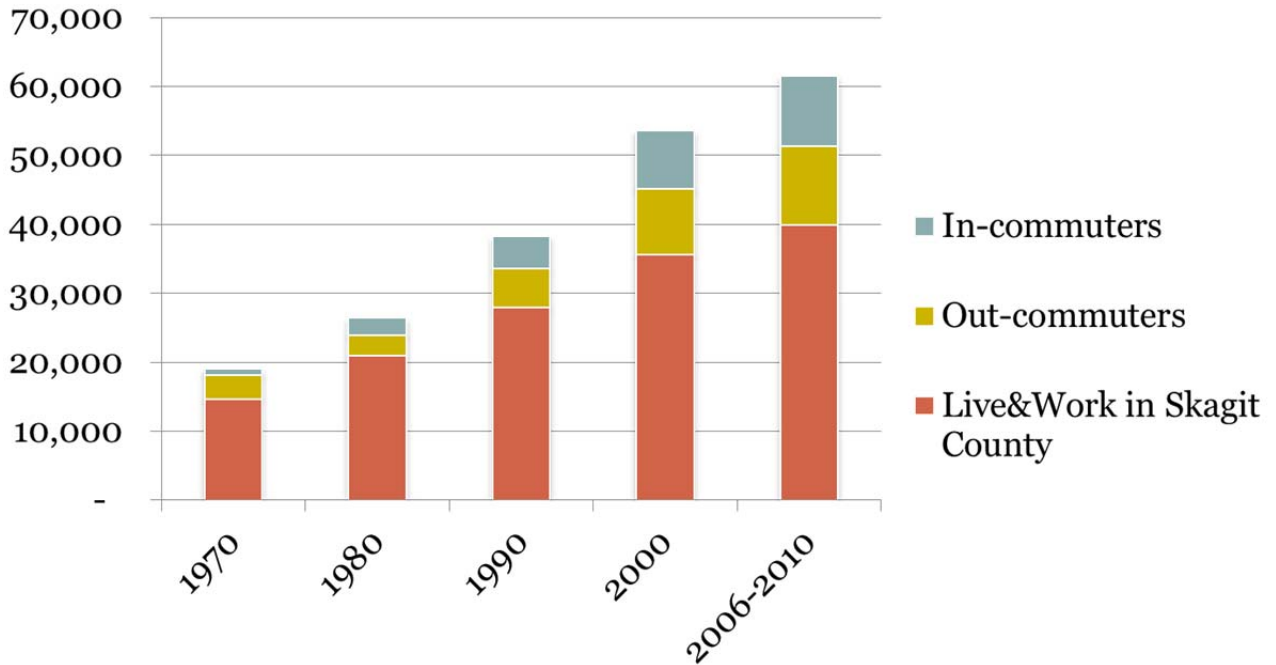
**Exhibit 4. Skagit County Workers' Place of Residence**



The percentage of workers in Skagit County who live in Skagit County, versus in other nearby counties.

Sources: Census Transportation Planning Products; U.S. Census Decennial Census (1970-2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

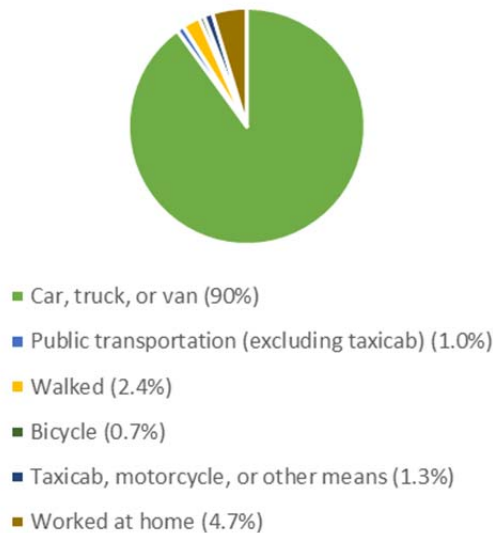
**Exhibit 5. Commute Migration Trends**



Sources: Census Transportation Planning Products; U.S. Census Decennial Census (1970-2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

- **Means of Transportation to Work.** Approximately 90% of Skagit County residents commute to work by a car, truck or van including carpooling and rideshare.

**Exhibit 6. Means of Transportation to Work**



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-13

- **Ferry Ridership Expected to Increase.** According to the 2010 Guemes Island Subarea Plan, ridership is expected to increase by 21.1% for vehicles and 7.3% for walk on passengers by the year 2030.

- **Pedestrian Counts.** According to the 2010 *Island-Skagit Metropolitan & Regional Transportation Plan (MRTP)* walking accounted for 5.8% of all trips within Skagit County. The SCOG performed bicycle and pedestrian counts at key locations for three days from September 30<sup>th</sup> through October 2, 2014 from 7-9am and again from 4-6pm. The counts do not address overall mode share for pedestrian and bicyclists, but indicate pedestrian and bicycle activity at specific locations. In total 473 bicyclists and 1,657 pedestrians were observed. Additional pedestrian and bicycle counts are planned.

## KEY QUESTIONS

Key questions for consideration in the Transportation Element Update include:

- What do you think the top priorities for Skagit County are in terms of the County's transportation system?
- What are the most important transportation needs and priorities for maintaining a vibrant economy in Skagit County?
- What should Skagit County's role be in promoting non-motorized transportation and physical activity, relative to the role of the cities and towns?
- With roadway maintenance and capacity expansion needs greater than the amount of available funding, how should Skagit County address the shortfall?
- What should be the primary considerations when making transportation investments?
- How do you see transportation patterns changing over the next 20 years and why?