I. INTRODUCTION

A. TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

The Transportation Systems Plan is one of two components of the Transportation Element of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan. The other is the Transportation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that contains the Goals, Objectives and Policies for Transportation. Together they comprise a long-range plan for Skagit County's transportation well into the 21st century.

B. GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT (GMA)

In March of 1990 the Washington State Legislature passed a landmark bill on growth management, SHB-2929. In the following year it passed a second growth management bill, RSHB-1025. Together, these two bills are commonly referred to as the Growth Management Act, or simply the GMA. The Skagit County Transportation Systems Plan, in conjunction with other planning efforts in the County, has been developed for the expressed purpose of meeting the transportation planning requirements of the GMA. Implementation of this plan is done through the Six Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Any and all modification of this plan are made based on the analysis of road conditions, in accordance with State law, in conjunction with adopted County policies, and with appropriate public input.

One of the new aspects of the Growth Management Act is that it creates direct links between transportation investments and land use or land development. In the long term, the GMA requires that the determination of future transportation needs be based on the land use plan, and, if the resources are not available in the long term to provide for the needed transportation improvements, the land use plan growth assumptions must be changed. On the project level, this link is made through the requirement that the transportation improvements needed to meet level of service standards must be provided concurrent with land development. (See Chapter V. for a discussion of LOS standards and concurrency.) In summary, a community can no longer plan for growth if it does not have the capacity to provide the transportation improvements which support that growth.

1. Planning Goals

There are thirteen "planning goals" which are specifically stated in the GMA legislation (RCW 36.70AO20). The following three clearly relate to the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

(3) Transportation. Encourage efficient multi-modal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.

(11) Citizen Participation and Coordination. Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.

(12) Public facilities and services. Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

2. Specific Requirements

The GMA has very specific requirements for what should go into the Transportation Elements for city and county Comprehensive Plans. To meet these requirements, local jurisdictions have taken various approaches in the plan development process. In Skagit County, we have developed the Transportation Element in two separate parts: the Transportation Goals, Objectives, & Policies; and, the Transportation Systems Plan. The Transportation Systems Plan, which includes the Financial Plan, is intended to meet the following GMA transportation element requirements from RCW 36. 70AO70(6):

(a) Land use assumptions used in estimating travel

(b) Facilities and service needs, including:

I. An inventory of air, water and land transportation facilities and services, including transit alignments, to define existing capital facilities and travel levels as a basis for future planning;

II. Level of service standards for all arterial and transit routes to serve as a gauge to judge performance of the system. These standards should be regionally coordinated;

III. Specific actions and requirements for bringing into compliance any facilities or services that are below the established level of service standards;

IV. Forecasts of travel 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;

V. Identification of system expansion needs and transportation system management needs to meet current and future demands;

(c) Finance, including;

I. An analysis of funding capability to judge against probable funding resources;

II. *A multi year financing plan... which shall serve as the basis of the six year street, road, or transit program...*

III. If probable funding falls short ...how land use assumptions will be reassessed to ensure that level of service standards will be met.

(d) Intergovernmental coordination efforts, including an assessment of the impacts... on the transportation systems of adjacent jurisdictions;

(e) Demand management strategies.

C. OTHER TRANSPORTATION PLANS & STUDIES

In addition to the Transportation Goals, Objectives, and Policies, and the Transportation Systems Plan, there are four other transportation plans and studies, one being developed and three already adopted, that are closely related to the county's Transportation Element. These are the Non-motorized Transportation Plan, the County-wide Air, Rail, Water, and Port Transportation System Study, the Skagit Sub-Regional Transportation Plan, and the State Highway Systems Plan.

1. Skagit County Non-motorized Transportation Plan

Incorporated into this document as Chapter X, the Skagit County Non-motorized Transportation Plan addresses transportation issues associated with pedestrian and bicycle access, safety and mobility throughout unincorporated Skagit County. The plan was developed concurrently with the Countywide Non-motorized Transportation policies adopted in August of 2000 by the Skagit Council of Governments. The plan establishes design and performance standards for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and clarifies the transportation function and priority of certain facilities developed by other agencies and entities.

2. Air, Rail, Water, and Port Transportation System Study

The Skagit Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization, in conjunction with the Port of Skagit County, the Port of Anacortes, and the Washington State Department of Transportation, hired a consultant to conduct the County-wide Air, Rail, Water, and Port Transportation System Study for the Skagit County sub-region. The primary purpose of the study was to produce transportation planning information for the ports and to produce the air, rail, and water and goods movement sections of the Regional Transportation Plan.

In early 1996, this Study was adopted by the Sub-RTPO Policy Board and has been made a part of the Regional Transportation Plan. Since the analysis in the study includes interviews with many transportation users and providers in the private sector, the information included is both useful and original. The discussions in the Transportation Systems Plan on trucking, on rail, and on ports, intermodal, and multimodal facilities are based extensively on information from this study.

3. Regional Transportation Plan

In the spring of 1996, after about two years of staff work, the Skagit Sub- RTPO Policy Board approved the Skagit Sub-Regional Transportation Plan. Among other things, this plan defines the regional transportation facilities and services; documents the regional transportation planning process; lays out regional transportation issues and needs; presents the regional development strategy; documents the analytical techniques used, including the Regional Traffic Model; presents regional transportation goals and policies; and speaks to regional transportation financing, implementation and monitoring. This plan, the Countywide planning policies and the

transportation elements of the local Comprehensive Plans are required by law to be consistent.

4. State Highway Systems Plan

Several years ago, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) began a process to do long range (20-year) transportation facility plans on state highways. The "State Highway Systems Plan, 1997-2016" in conjunction with "Washington's Transportation Plan, 1997-2016" is the result of the latest effort. In the process, WSDOT has incorporated significant input from the local agencies and the RTPO to help develop long- range solutions for transportation problems.

The State Highway Systems Plan includes expenditure items broken into maintenance, traffic operations, preservation, and improvements. The improvements section is subdivided into mobility, safety, economic and environmental. The 20-year needs are presented and the potential revenue is analyzed. The Plan documents a huge shortfall of revenue vs. needs over the next 20 years, even under optimistic financing scenarios. Out of this Plan come a number of critical highway improvement projects that will be needed over the next 20 years in order to keep a reasonable level of service throughout the entire street, road, and highway system within Skagit County. (See Chapter VI for discussion of state needs.)

D. TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS PLANNING PROCESS

A transportation systems plan, in contrast to a transportation policy plan, emphasizes the physical transportation systems and the future improvements that will be needed. In this Transportation Systems Plan, much emphasis is on the County road system since the majority of Skagit County transportation dollars are targeted there. The systems planning process for County roads follows the following steps which correspond closely to the above mentioned GMA requirements from RCW 36.70AO70(6) and WAC 365-195-325:

1. Inventory the transportation system including current traffic levels.

2. Develop a Level of Service methodology and Level of Service Standards for the road system.

3. Apply the LOS Standards to the current or base year road system to determine the current needs, if any.

4. Forecast future traffic levels using land use based traffic modeling techniques.

5. Compare the LOS Standards to the future year traffic level to determine the future needs.

6. From the current and future needs (3. and 5.) develop specific projects and incorporate them into a long range (20 year) Transportation Improvement Program.

7. Develop a Financial Plan to fund the long range Transportation Improvement Program.