

## VIII. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Skagit County staff has been involved in transportation related intergovernmental coordination for a number of years. However, this coordination has expanded in recent years, partially because of new coordination requirements that stem from the Growth Management Act and the ISTEA legislation. The factor that has had the most dramatic effect in such coordination has been the establishment of the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization.

### A. LEGISLATION

The 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA) specifically emphasizes the importance of intergovernmental coordination in the development of the local transportation elements. RCW 36.70A.070 requires *"Intergovernmental coordination efforts, including an assessment of the impacts of the transportation plan and land use assumptions on the transportation systems of adjacent jurisdictions"*. GMA also requires regionally coordinated level of service standards for each city and county doing GMA planning. The Federal ISTEA legislation of 1991 took this coordination one step further by emphasizing the need for regional prioritization of local transportation projects. Together, GMA and ISTEA have been a catalyst for the expansion of transportation related intergovernmental coordination activities in the State of Washington.

In addition to requiring intergovernmental coordination in transportation planning, the GMA created a mechanism to actually accomplish this requirement through the establishment of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs). The purpose of the RTPOs can be seen through the RTPO Guidelines, which state, *"the Regional Transportation Planning program creates a formal mechanism for local governments and the state to coordinate transportation planning for regional transportation facilities."* The RTPO Planning Standards also require the Regional Transportation Plans to have Regional Goals and policies on intergovernmental coordination.

In 1991, Skagit County's governmental jurisdictions joined together with those of Island County to form the Skagit/Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization. Prior to that, some intergovernmental coordination took place between the Skagit County Planning Department and the cities in the development of the Transportation portion of the GMA County-wide Policies. Since then, much of the intergovernmental coordination on transportation issues in Skagit County have taken place through the RTPO.

## VIII. Intergovernmental Coordination

### B. RTPO STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

#### 1. Staff Committees

At the staff level, intergovernmental coordination has increased substantially in Skagit County within the past five years. Following the lead of the Planning Directors in Skagit County who had met regularly to discuss GMA issues, the RTPO Technical Committee was formed in Skagit County in 1992 to discuss and make recommendations on the county-wide transportation issues. This committee went beyond the Planning Directors group by bringing both planners and engineers from the various agencies together to share their thoughts, approaches and expertise. In addition to the County and the cities, representation on this committee includes the ports, the tribes, SCOG, Skagit Transit, and WSDOT. Many transportation issues have been reviewed by the Committee. In most instances, consensus recommendations for action by the local RTPO Policy Board have been reached.

#### 2. Boards & Elected Officials

Even more important than the intergovernmental coordination through staff committees is the coordination of decision making of elected officials. In the transportation area, this is now taking place primarily at the Skagit Sub-RTPO Policy Board. This board, comprised of elected officials from the County, the cities, and the ports among others, has provided a forum for county-wide decision making on transportation issues and projects. A similar board with many of the same members is the STP Board, which is a sub-committee of the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) Board. The STP Board has responsibilities in making transportation project decisions for the ISTEA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds.

With respect to public transit decisions in Skagit County, the Skagit Transit (SKAT) Board of Directors is the primary elected official board. It's original membership has included three County Commissioners and two elected officials from each of the cities of Burlington and Mount Vernon. Since the service area for SKAT was expanded from the original two cities to include Sedro- Woolley, Anacortes, LaConner and connecting unincorporated areas, the Board membership was expanded to include the mayors of Anacortes and Sedro- Woolley .

## VIII. Intergovernmental Coordination

### C. RTPO AUTHORITY

The Policy Boards of the Skagit/Island RTPO have been involved in a number of coordinated transportation decisions over the past two years. Probably the truest measure for the effectiveness of intergovernmental coordination in transportation can be found in the county-wide and/or regional decisions on transportation projects. Four examples are mentioned below.

#### 1. ISTEA "Enhancement" Project Prioritization

The very first action that the Skagit/Island RTPO Policy Boards took when they were initially formed in 1992 was to regionally prioritize local projects competing for ISTEA "Enhancement" funding. This represented the first time that local officials formally prioritized local transportation projects in the application for state or federal funding. While this process was somewhat difficult in the first year, it has proceeded much smoother in the three subsequent years. The importance of this experience with "Enhancement" funds is that it proved that representatives of local agencies, both staff and elected officials, could come together and arrive at consensus decisions on transportation project funding priorities for the region.

#### 2. STP Project Funding

The biggest TEA-21 funding program targeted for local governmental jurisdictions is the Surface Transportation Program (STP). Funding from this program are allocated by county area, and the jurisdictions from each county are responsible to regionally prioritize projects for funding. Some of each county area allocation is required to be spent in the "rural" area. In Skagit County, it was mutually agreed upon to segregate the funds into "urban" and "rural", and target the "urban" funds for the urban growth areas of the four major cities. Then funding distribution goals were established for the each of these urban growth areas. Within these areas, any jurisdiction, city, port, transit, etc. can compete for eligible projects. The "rural" funds then can go for any projects located outside of these UGAs.

The regional prioritization requirement became a difficult issue in Skagit County because it had never been considered before. It was resolved by the establishment of a system to evaluate and prioritize each proposed project based on several county-wide (regional) benefit criteria and on several financial criteria. This approach has been successful not only in producing regionally beneficial projects.

## VIII. Intergovernmental Coordination

### 3. Certification Guidelines

One of the original legislative responsibilities given to RTPOs by the GMA is to certify that the transportation elements of the comprehensive plans of member counties and cities fulfill all the state requirements and are consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan. The Skagit Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization was one of the first in the State to develop guidelines, forms, and procedures for accomplishing this certification. Its Certification of Transportation Elements process includes a general consistency evaluation to ensure that the policies of each jurisdiction's transportation element are consistent with state transportation policies, with the approved county-wide policies, and with the policies of neighboring jurisdictions.

### 4. Regional TIP

In 1995 the Skagit Sub-Region, for the first time, created a County-wide Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This includes all major transportation projects throughout the County. This TIP is updated each year and is critical for ensuring continued eligibility for federal funds.

## D. COORDINATION OF STUDIES

A substantial amount of intergovernmental coordination has gone into most of the major transportation studies that have been done over the past several years in Skagit County. The four largest cities have conducted transportation studies in conjunction with their GMA Comprehensive Plan work. Three have made significant efforts to coordinate both the scopes of work and the technical assumptions with RTPO staff to ensure consistency with the RTPO planning work. The County as well as the R TPO has coordinated their transportation studies. Four specific County-wide studies which have had substantial intergovernmental coordination are discussed below.

### 1. Skagit County Non-motorized Transportation Plan

The Non-motorized Transportation Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Transportation Element came from the Skagit County Non-motorized Transportation Plan. This proposed plan was developed in 2000 through the Department of Public Works, and was coordinated with the development of County-wide Non-motorized Transportation Policies for the Skagit Council of Governments. In addition to the

## VIII. Intergovernmental Coordination

coordination with the County's Parks and Recreation Department during plan development, further coordination with the cities was added through the RTPO process.

The Non-motorized Transportation Plan is included as Chapter X of this document.

### 2. Multi-Modal Facility Study

The "Multi-Modal Facility Study", a siting study for the location of a multi-modal passenger rail terminal, is another example of an intergovernmental coordination effort. A Steering Committee with representation from Mount Vernon, Burlington, Skagit County, the RTPO, SCOG, SKAT, and WSDOT guided the work of the consultant in their analysis and evaluation of alternative sites.

### 3. Air, Rail, Water, & Port Transportation Study

The Port of Anacortes, the Port of Skagit County, the Skagit Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and the WSDOT jointly funded a County-wide Air, Rail, Water and Port Transportation Study for Skagit County. This study has been adopted by the RTPO and now represents a major component of the Regional Transportation Plan. Some of the study's data and results have been incorporated into this Transportation Systems Plan.

### 4. State Highway Systems Plan

As mentioned in Chapter I, WSDOT has made a significant effort to include input from the RTPO and directly from local agencies in the latest State Highway Systems Plan. The RTPO has been a forum for taking conceptual solutions to highway related transportation problems and helping WSDOT come up with reasonable project alternatives and priorities.

## E. TRAFFIC MODELING COORDINATION

### 1. County-wide Traffic Model

In addition to the coordination of data and assumptions discussed in Sections III and IV, the County coordinated many of its assumptions in the Skagit County Traffic Model with WSDOT and some of the cities. Specifically, WSDOT staff laid out "most probably" development scenarios for the next 20 years from the state

## VIII. Intergovernmental Coordination

Transportation Systems Plan. These assumptions were incorporated into the future year runs of the model. In addition, many of the detailed factors that went into the model were discussed with individuals working on the city models. (See Chapter IV for more details.)

The County has accomplished much of the requirement to assess transportation impacts on adjacent jurisdictions through this County-wide traffic modeling effort. Because of the low level of growth planned for outside of the cities' urban growth areas, the County's land use impacts on the cities will be small. However, the land use growth in the cities will have significant impacts on the County's road network because of its extensive intra-county connections. One advantage of doing a County-wide traffic model is that the combined impacts of all the land use plans in the County are analyzed at one time. The results have been compared with these of the cities to help determine the accuracy of the cities' analysis and assumptions. This effort will be repeated when the County revises the Comprehensive Plan in 2002.

### 2. Regional Traffic Model

Prior to the completion of the Regional Transportation Plan, the RTPPO set up a process to work out any differences in the data and assumptions used in the individual traffic models in Skagit County. This process produced a consensus on the assumptions that went into a Regional Traffic Model which is the basis for the Regional Transportation Plan and for future regional transportation projects. This model is a refinement of the County-wide Traffic Model and includes the consensus assumptions mentioned above.

## F. OTHER CITY/COUNTY/WSDOT COORDINATION

There are a variety of other transportation coordination activities that have taken place in Skagit County over the past several years. These relate primarily to WSDOT and Federal Highway Administration projects and programs, and in most cases, the County has taken a lead role in this coordination.

One example was the coordination work on the adjustment of "urban area" boundaries and the adjustments to the "urban" and "rural" functional classification of streets, roads and highways. County staff provided the local link to ensure that each city knew what was required and actually got the work done.

### G. COORDINATION OF LOS STANDARDS

An important issue to all jurisdictions doing GMA planning is the coordination of LOS standards with other jurisdictions in the area. The specific requirement from the GMA is that level of service standards for transportation facilities *"should be regionally coordinated"*. One of the purposes for this coordination is to help ensure that the region maintains an interconnected transportation system which does not have severe changes in quality of facility at jurisdictional lines. Another is to help ensure that each jurisdiction is doing its appropriate share in the maintenance and improvement of the overall system. In Skagit County, like in most other counties, the issue is most important in the Urban Growth Areas.

The individual road LOS standard used for concurrency, LOS C based on Highway Capacity Manual (HCM), is similar to the standards used by the State and cities in the Skagit County. For instance, the LOS standard for rural state highways is HCM LOS C, exactly the same as the County's. For specific intersection projects, the County uses standard HCM LOS methodology and standard warrants analysis as do the cities and the State. All the cities use HCM methodology, but with differing standards. In general, there is consistency between the County's individual road LOS standard and the LOS standards of the other local agencies. Also, the County uses the same construction standards as other agencies in the area for major reconstruction projects.

As stated above, LOS coordination and consistency are most critical in the Urban Growth Areas. This is where city standards will eventually apply when the land is annexed. Skagit County has several policies, 4.5, and 27.1 through 27.5, which deal directly with LOS and road improvement issues within the UGAs. Dialog on this topic began several years ago at the RTPO level, and the County negotiated specific interlocal agreements with each city individually to deal with level of service, road standards, and other related issues in the urban growth areas. These agreements will go beyond regional coordination of LOS standards by dealing with specific transportation infrastructure requirements.