

Commuter Trip Reduction Law Update 2021

EVOLUTION OF A PROVEN PROGRAM TO BETTER ADDRESS EQUITY AND CLIMATE

Purpose

Excitement is building among local, regional, and state interests to broaden commuter trip reduction to further address equity and climate. The state Legislature has provided an opportunity for transportation demand management stakeholders across the state to share their ideas. The purpose of this report is to provide a framework that supports an inclusive and effective policy discussion.

The Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Executive Board, TDM Technical Committee, and WSDOT propose program expansion to enhance mobility for people with special transportation needs, midday and weekend congestion, and congestion in locations currently not covered. Once we receive feedback from legislators and stakeholders, the TDM Executive Board, TDM Technical Committee, and WSDOT will develop and propose program changes and identify funding needs.

Potential new CTR program emphasis areas

In the 2021 regular session, the Legislature directed the Commuter Trip Reduction Board (aka the TDM Technical Committee and Executive Board) and WSDOT to conduct an update of the commuter trip reduction law ([SHB 1514](#), Sec. 4).

After consultation with key stakeholders, the TDM Technical Committee, Executive Board, and WSDOT developed a set of recommended emphasis areas for an updated CTR law and program to address trends that are driving change in transportation. **These emphasis areas would be in addition to the original program** focus on commuter trips at large employer worksites. If the program is expanded to address one or more of these emphasis areas, **CTR jurisdictions would customize their program based on local conditions** to address commuter and non-commuter trips and travel outside the peak morning commute. Recommended emphasis areas:

- **Support essential workers and people with special transportation needs.**

Expand the program to support more multimodal transportation options throughout the state for essential workers; shift workers; and people with special transportation needs, including historically marginalized communities, people with low incomes and/or disabilities, tribes, BIPOC, and residents of rural areas.

- **Address urban congestion.**

Strengthen the program by providing current CTR jurisdictions greater flexibility to specifically address congestion at all hours.

- **Enable expansion to new locations.**

Provide resources to enable WSDOT and interested local partners to expand CTR beyond current locations to address major congestion anywhere on the transportation system (e.g., congestion during weekends, events, or seasonal activities).

Accomplishments of the current CTR Program

As stated in the CTR law (RCW 70A.15.4000-4110), the purpose of the state’s CTR Program is to improve air quality, ease congestion, and reduce gasoline consumption.

There are two major actions mandated by the CTR law to accomplish this purpose: 1) engage major employers to provide commute trip reduction programs, and 2) engage local and regional governments to support/collaborate with them on these programs.

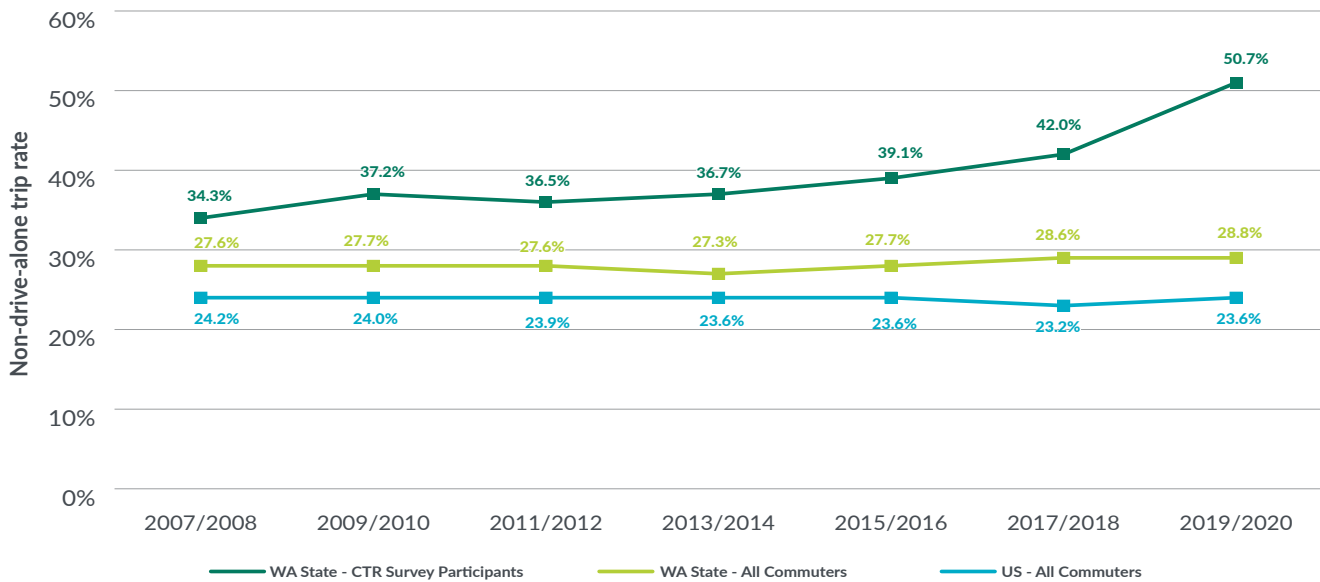
The CTR Program has been very effective in accomplishing its stated goals. In the 30 years since the CTR law was adopted in 1991, jurisdictions have partnered with employers and state, regional, and local agencies to implement CTR programs in affected urban growth areas. As required by the CTR law, the CTR programs largely focus on employers who have 100 or more full-time employees who commute to a worksite on weekdays between 6 and 9 a.m.

The CTR programs helped to **reduce roughly 30 percent of vehicle miles traveled per employee per day** from 2007 to 2020 (10.9 to 7.6, respectively). The **reduction in vehicle miles means roughly 9 million fewer gallons of fuel used each year**, saving commuters nearly \$58 million. This also leads to an **annual reduction of about 175,000 metric tons in greenhouse-gas emissions**. Additionally, the cars left at home by commute trip reduction-affected employees every weekday represents about one lane of bumper-to-bumper traffic for 91 miles (equivalent to the distance from Olympia to Everett or Spokane to Grand Coulee Dam).

These programs largely focus on enabling and incentivizing employees to ride the bus, rideshare, walk, bicycle, or telework. Local CTR coalitions have:

- Boosted transit ridership through widespread availability of employer-sponsored transit passes.
- Created thousands of employer-supported vanpools.
- Expanded the use of compressed work schedules, flex schedules, and telework.

Of the nearly 600,000 employees working at CTR-affected worksites from 2019 to 2020, 50.7 percent chose alternatives to driving alone for their commute to and from work. This is 76 percent higher than the state average (28.8 percent), and 115 percent higher than the national average (23.6 percent).¹



¹ Performance data were influenced by two unusual circumstances related to COVID-19. First, there was a significant increase in telework for the sites that surveyed after March 2020. Second, almost 200 fewer worksites surveyed in 2019-2020 than in 2017-2018. These sites have historically reported vehicle miles traveled above the current cycle’s statewide average. It is likely that part of the improvement in the numbers is due to those sites not surveying. While the gains from telework are sustainable, the next cycle that surveys all CTR-affected worksites will likely have results that fall somewhere between the numbers from 2017-2018 and 2019-2020.

While CTR has continued its focus on large employers over the years, the CTR law also provides discretion for the program to evolve and to allow a broader reach and more flexibility to jurisdictions. Several jurisdictions including Redmond, Seattle, Snohomish County, Spokane, Tacoma, Tukwila, Vancouver, and Yakima have availed themselves of the flexibility provided in CTR to form Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers (GTECs) or submit alternate plans to focus CTR efforts on all trips in a geographic area.

Why expand the CTR Program?

Despite all the worthy accomplishments of the current CTR Program, there are a number of important statewide considerations that cannot be addressed under the current law. Expansion of the law would enable these considerations to be addressed in the CTR Program. Gaps identified by the current law include:

- **The CTR Program addresses only 4 percent of daily trips in Washington** with its current focus on commute trips at large employers. Expansion of the program to the recommended emphasis areas would begin to capture the other 96 percent of daily trips in the state. That substantial number of trips and their effects on congestion and air quality could now be addressed under CTR.
- **The current program reaches largely white-collar office workers.** The current program does not address shift workers, retail workers, hospitality workers, health care workers, part-time workers, workers at small businesses, or any workers traveling outside of the 6-9 a.m. weekday timeframe. It does not address congestion happening on weekends; congestion caused by events such as sports, conferences, or concerts; or congestion caused by recreational activities such as skiing and hiking. Expansion of the program to include these groups and activities would extend the program benefits to underserved people and localities and address congestion wherever and whenever it occurs.
- **The current program is required only in affected urban growth areas.** Most of the state is not covered. By expanding the program to communities that are currently not covered by the program (see map on page 4), program benefits would increase to more communities. These benefits include more travel options, reduced congestion, and improved air quality.
- The current CTR law allows other communities to opt in. However, funding levels have kept this from happening. **Funding would need to be increased to cover expansion of the program.**

Next steps

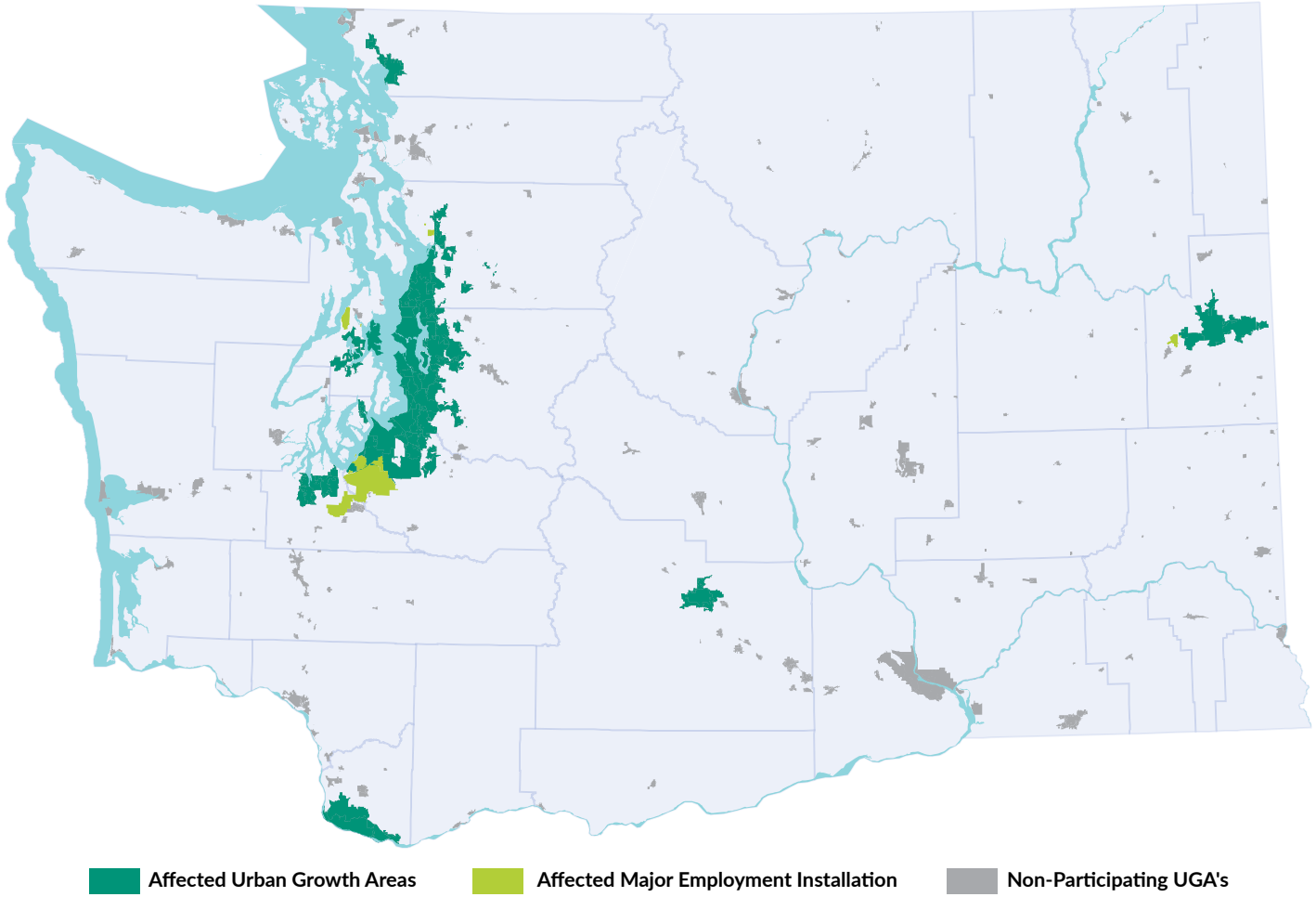
The TDM Board and TDM Technical Committee will take the following steps to explore expansion of the CTR Program:

First Quarter 2022 – Deliver a comprehensive report to the Legislature on an update to the CTR Program. The technical report will detail CTR Program history and requirements, governance practices, and relevant social and economic trends.

Spring/Summer 2022 – Engage the Legislature and other stakeholders to gain their unput on future CTR Program emphasis areas.

Fourth Quarter 2022 – Develop and submit legislation that supports updated CTR Program emphasis areas.

Affected Areas in the CTR Program



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