

 **Policy Recommendations**

Phase I of the plan development included an assessment of existing state and federal planning laws and existing Transportation Commission policies. This set of directives was the benchmark against which the proposed needs were evaluated. For the most part it was determined that existing policy guidance provides clear expectations and affords implementation strategies leading to success. In selected areas where either innovative investment concepts or programs were proposed, it was determined that existing policy is insufficient to guide future investment decisions.

This section of the plan is a summary of gaps in transportation investment policy guidance, where it does not provide sufficient direction to address a problem, direct investment options, or guide program outcomes. Adoption and implementation of the recommendations in this chapter of the plan will provide momentum to establish the necessary guidance for improving strategic transportation investment decisions in the future.

- The Commission recommends that the state's role in making specific transportation investments be clarified or defined.
- In addition the Commission recommends that data collection and further study is needed in several areas to better understand the problems.
- It is recognized that all existing Transportation Commission policies will be evaluated in the near future in light of changes to the Commission's roles and responsibilities as a result of state legislation in 2005 and 2006. The evaluation process is planned to include updating, consolidating, and editing to make these policies more effective tools to guide Washington State's transportation future.

Key Policy Recommendations

In addition to the strategic priorities outlined, the Transportation Commission makes several policy recommendations in the WTP. Some of the most critical are:

Funding

- Identify strategies and methods to provide sustainable revenue sources for transportation, including tolling and innovative approaches.
- The state ferry finance study should identify the target percentage of system operating costs to be recovered from farebox revenues, with identifiable, sustainable sources of funding flows to cover the balance of operating expenses as well as the system's long-term capital needs.
- Develop a policy that defines the state's role and level of investment in public transportation.

Safety

Identify cost effective ways in which the state and local agencies responsible for safety on highways, streets, and roads can coordinate their efforts to achieve statewide safety goals in a comprehensive manner.

Congestion Relief

Develop a state policy and strategy to maximize traffic flows on the state's most congested highways. Assess the cost and benefits of expanding transit systems as a means of improving the overall utilization of street and road capacity.

Transportation and the Economy

- Measure the economic impacts and benefits of making transportation investments in the different regions and economies of the state.
- Define the state's role in making these investments, considering cost and benefit trade-offs.

Identify the transportation system elements that are critical to maintaining and improving Washington State's global competitiveness.

Land Use and Transportation

- Improve concurrency between transportation and land use decisions to ensure complementary development of land with transportation infrastructure.
- Clarify the state and local responsibility and options for addressing highway congestion that are driven by local permitting decisions.

Reduce Reliance on Fossil Fuels

- Support development and implementation of a state policy on alternative fuel development and use which could include the identification of possible regulatory and tax structures.
- Identify opportunities and strategies for addressing the growing demand for alternative fuels and their benefits to the environment.

Rural Economic Vitality

- Improve farm-to-market access by determining strategic investments in rail.
- Define the state's role in establishing and funding a year-round, statewide, core all-weather road system in rural areas.

Emergency Preparedness

Clarify the role of state and local governments in providing personal mobility and freight service in the event of a major disruption to the transportation system or in case of catastrophic events.

Preservation

Existing Commission Policies

- Protect our investments by keeping transportation infrastructure in sound operating condition.
- Emphasize infrastructure preservation and maintenance as the priority in funding transportation programs.
- Use lowest life-cycle cost methodology to determine the appropriate schedule for upkeep.

Ample policy exists to allow for preservation investments at all jurisdictional levels to continue as funding is available. In this situation, the WTP finds that what is needed is not more policy direction, but additional funding to keep pace with prevailing wage laws, and escalating costs of construction materials and fuel, as well as the increasing demand for limited materials.

The WTP recognizes that much policy debate has occurred in the past two decades about the best way to invest in maintenance, preservation, and improvement of the entire system. The final report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation made a determination in Recommendation Five, that studded tire damage to the system should be addressed by either phasing them out or establishing a surcharge for their use. In 2001 heavy weight studs were prohibited. In 2004, the Washington State Transportation Commission passed a resolution to request that the legislature outlaw all studded tires. Thus far, legislation has not passed to this effect.

Damage to roadway surfaces increases proportionately as the weight of vehicles increase. Imposing weight restrictions on vulnerable surfaces (certain bridges and pavements) assists in extending the service life of that transportation asset.

These preservation issues will continue to be discussed in future legislative sessions. Operational practices will reflect future changes to policy as they are enacted.

Safety

Existing Commission Policies

- Improve safety through continuous reduction in the societal cost of accidents.
- Emphasize traveler safety and security as a primary consideration in the planning, designing, constructing, maintaining, and operating of all transportation systems.
- Support comprehensive transportation safety programs that target improving operator behavior and vehicle design and condition.

Action

Outcome

Strategic Highway Safety Plan

Federal, state, and local agencies, and private organizations have been consulted and have contributed to the development of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. This plan provides a comprehensive framework of specific goals, objectives, and strategies for reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries. The Washington Transportation Plan recognizes the recommendations of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan as the necessary policy and action strategies to address the long-range safety needs of Washington State.

Reduction in fatalities and injuries resulting from automobile collisions.

Improve Safety Data and Sharing

In cooperation with those involved in current efforts to produce the Statewide Highway Safety Plan, the Department of Transportation should implement a traffic records strategic plan to decrease paper usage by keeping electronic records; develop the Emergency Management System registry; improve data detail and location accuracy; improve statewide collision data; and design new law enforcement traffic collision reports and citizen reports.

Increase amount of safety data available for analysis. Increase analysis capacity. Improve safety-related data at various jurisdiction levels. Use improved safety data to target system improvements.

Safety, Continued

Action

Outcome

▶ Aviation Study

The General Aviation (GA) Airport Weather Safety Feasibility Study will determine needed weather-related improvements to airports.

Determine needed weather-related improvements to GA airports, to make airports safer, and more effective.

▶ Address Truck Parking Capacity on State Highways

The Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the Washington State Patrol, the industry (trucking and truck stop providers), and the RTPOs should recommend options for defining the state's role and appropriate investment, if any, in providing adequate, safe, and legal areas near state highways where commercial truckers can park and rest. The WSDOT 2005 Truck Parking Study should provide information to develop an action plan for this process.

An action plan to address how best to provide truck parking and rest areas, determine the various stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, and identify where truck parking and rest areas are needed most.

It is the goal of this action plan to: provide safe and legal areas for commercial truck drivers to park so that drivers can take federally-mandated rests during long drives and decrease truck driver fatigue. Decrease the number of trucks parked illegally in undesirable and unsafe areas, such as weigh stations, chain up/down areas, highway ramps and shoulders, and local streets and parking lots by providing additional safe and legal parking capacity. Improve safety on highways and local roads. Increase transportation security. Decrease environmental impacts of truck parking and idling.

Economic Vitality

Existing Commission Policies

- Support the economy through reduced barriers to the movement of people, products, and information.
- Support investments in freight transportation services and infrastructure that maintain Washington State's competitive geographic advantage for world and domestic trade, and contribute to the economic productivity of the state.
- Value the movement of freight and people equitably.
- To the degree possible, streamline laws and regulations impacting freight transportation to allow ease of compliance and coordinated administration among jurisdictions.
- Support transportation investment that contributes to economic development.
- Support those aspects of the transportation system that enhance tourism.
- Develop good connections across interstate and international borders.

Action

Outcome

Statewide core all-weather county road network

The Transportation Commission should recommend a policy regarding the state's role in establishing and funding a statewide core all-weather county road system. Develop a process to identify and prioritize investments that will minimize the economic impacts of freeze- and or thaw-related road closures on freight dependent industries, by identifying the most critical routes affected by freeze-and-thaw winter conditions through working with cities and counties, as well as freight stakeholders and associations, the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board, Transportation Improvement Board, County Road Administration Board, Washington State Association of Counties, and the Washington Department of Transportation.

Connect businesses and industries to the state highway system so they can ship and receive products year-round. Prioritize investments to provide maximum benefit for affected industries and regional economies. Support the state's job base in agribusiness, manufacturing, construction, and natural resource-based sectors.

Regional Economic Development

The Department of Transportation should work with cities, counties, tribes, the Washington State Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, and local economic development councils, regional agencies, and the private sector to evaluate the economy and the economic development impacts of transportation infrastructure and services. The Department should also develop performance measures and rating criteria, so that future project selection can provide the best return on investment for growing Washington State's economy, and implement existing Transportation Commission policies.

Improved coordination of future capital funds will promote investments in job-producing private development and help expand the tax base for other necessary public services and facilities. Improved understanding of how transportation contributes to regional economies.

Economic Vitality, Continued

Action

Outcome

Economic Sectors and Clusters

In response to “The Next Washington” Economic Plan from the Governor, the Department of Transportation should work with the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, cities, counties, tribes, and the private sector to:

- Determine a way to measure transportation investment outcomes and identify investments that contribute to regional economies. Identify the dependencies of various clusters on the transportation system.
- Identify the transportation system elements critical to maintaining and improving the performance and global competitiveness of these clusters.
- Determine the state’s share of transportation investments to meet these needs.
- Develop and implement a strategy to improve support for tourism as transportation investments are planned and built by increasing access to Washington State’s heritage and recreational assets.

Transportation contributes to achieving the goals identified in Washington State’s economic plan. A clear understanding of how transportation benefits Washington State’s economy; enhanced global competitiveness of Washington State’s transportation-reliant industry clusters; maximized opportunities for transportation investment partnerships with cluster industries; alignment of agency missions and common goals to increase effectiveness of state government investment. Development of a basis for measuring economic benefits of transportation investments.

Increased communication between the tourism sector, scenic byways, and state agencies through a structured event such as a scenic byway summit.

Emergency Preparedness and System Disruption Plan

Clarify the state’s role in ensuring timely restoration of freight service in the event of a major disruption to the transportation system. Working with all levels of transportation providers, develop a strategic plan for timely restoration of service that prioritizes freight transportation needs based on economic and quality of life impacts.

Plan and practice the state’s response to high-impact and unpredictable events that would critically affect the freight transportation system serving Washington State. Minimize negative short-term and long-term impacts to the state’s economic vitality and quality of life.

Develop and sustain economic growth

Clarify the state’s role in helping regional economies make capital investments in freight systems to develop and sustain economic growth. Support an ongoing, appropriate level of funding for regional economic development freight projects, port and intermodal access improvements, grade separations, short line rail improvements, and truck route programs to optimize truck movements in metro areas.

Provide incentives to help communities within a region prioritize desired freight improvements.

Assist communities in developing and sustaining economic growth through investments in regional freight systems. Improve port and intermodal access. Mitigate the impact of growth in freight rail volumes on Washington State communities. Provide incentives to optimize truck movements in congested urban areas.

Economic Vitality Continued

Action

Outcome

Fuel Distribution and Pipeline Capacity

Determine the state’s role in ensuring that fuel distribution and pipeline capacity alternatives meet Washington State’s long-term demand.

Analyze the constraints and develop a strategy to remove obstructions so that the market can respond to increasing demand.

Support the state’s long-term economic vitality by ensuring that fuel is efficiently supplied to Washington State citizens and businesses. Respond to increasing demand for fuel, when there is no plan to increase pipeline or refinery capacity in the state.

Main Line Rail

Following the completion of the Transportation Commission Rail Study (refer to Part III for further detail), determine the state’s role in enhancing main line freight rail capacity.

Please refer to III. Focus on Transportation, B. Transportation Policy Studies and Plans for additional information on the Rail Study.

Add main line rail capacity to support growth in international trade and regional economies. Improve safety. Maximize system capacity and eliminate or reduce bottlenecks. Improve the freight-passenger train interface and prevent future conflicts of service. Mitigate the impact of growth in freight rail volumes on Washington State communities.

Short Line Rail

Following the completion of the Transportation Commission Rail Study (refer to Part III for further detail), the Department of Transportation should develop an asset management plan for state-owned rail assets and define criteria for future investments in short line railroads.

WSDOT Should consider developing a strategic business plan to implement policies and address the viability of the short line railroad system in Washington, to include an analysis of:

- Ability of short line railroads to support regional economic development, with a comparison of the opportunity costs for alternate investments.
- Freight market trends that impact short line railroad viability.
- Track conditions and the cost of improvements required to operate the lines safely and efficiently.
- Impacts on county roads and the highway system if short line and/or branch lines aren’t viable. Separate analysis to be done for each low-volume, at-risk branch line.
- Commitment of main line rail service at a level sufficient to attract targeted customers.

Clarify the state’s role regarding financial support of short line freight railroads, and develop methods to fully assess the economic impact of such investments. Focus limited public resources on the most productive investment proposals. Support the development of regional economies and national and international trade.

Selection of short line freight rail projects is linked to achieving maximum investment potential.

Please refer to III. Focus on Transportation, B. Transportation Policy Studies and Plans for additional information on the Rail Study.

Economic Vitality, Continued

Action

Outcome

▶ Columbia-Snake River Trade Corridor:

Define a policy to ensure the long-term viability of the Columbia-Snake River trade corridor. In partnership with other responsible federal and state agencies, take a leadership role to ensure sound management of the locks, jetties, and main channel.

Develop and implement a strategic plan (in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging and lock maintenance plan) to dredge, maintain locks and jetties, and deepen the Columbia River channel down river.

Prevent closure or decreased efficiency of the Columbia-Snake River trade corridor for waterborne traffic. Maintain navigation infrastructure to accommodate increasingly larger ships and growing inland barge movements. Support economic growth by providing Washington State agribusiness and U.S. grain shippers with efficient access to world markets. Avoid increased freight traffic on Columbia Gorge highways and rail lines.

▶ Events of Statewide Significance

2010 Olympics—Participation in the Governor's 2010 Winter Olympics Task Force to seek grant funding, deliver priority projects, align project schedule to reduce travel delays, document successful projects, and share outcomes.

Enhanced traveler experience for visitors to the state during the Vancouver Winter Olympics; return trips to Washington state after the Olympics, increasing tourism's contribution to the state economy.

Mobility

Existing Commission Policies

- Make customer service primary.
- Consider, and implement where appropriate, operational changes that improve efficiency before expanding the existing transportation system.
- Operate transportation systems to work reliably and responsibly for the customer.
- Incorporate long-term operations needs in capital investment decisions.
- Promote the use of advanced technologies to improve system efficiency and service.
- Consider system operations a separate budget category with high priority for funding.
- Aggressively pursue access management to protect operations of existing and future systems.
- Identify and preserve vital transportation corridors and sites for future transportation uses.
- Support regions in adopting different and regionally-appropriate mobility strategies.
- Promote modal connections to provide seamless travel to the customer.
- Provide mobility for people with special needs.
- Use cost-benefit methodologies as key determinants in selecting mobility projects.
- Provide viable mobility choices for the customer and expand the system to accommodate growth.
- Recognize that there will be congestion on the system and the ability to control congestion by expansion of the system is limited due to funding and other considerations. Promote land management, telecommunications, and other innovative technologies as viable mobility options to reduce the impact of congestion on all system users. Support limited strategic expansions to accommodate growth and reduce congestion when possible.
- Recognize that the primary mode of travel for Washington State citizens will continue to be the private automobile, but provide citizens with mobility choices which include, at a minimum, some forms of public transportation.

Action

Outcome

Aviation

Address long-term passenger, cargo, and airport capacity and facility needs.

Complete a statewide airport capacity and facilities study by July 2006, conduct a market assessment of aviation demand, needs, and forecasted needs for the next 25 years by July 2007. Governor-appointed commission to develop recommendations on long-term needs for commercial and general aviation airports by July 2009.

Identify gaps and deficiencies within the air transportation system and provide recommendations on how to address future long-term passenger, air cargo, and airport facility needs.

Mobility, Continued

Action

Outcome

▶ Aviation, continued

The Department of Transportation should complete the aviation system plan with classification of airports and performance standards.

The study will focus on 139 commercial and general aviation airports within the state, with emphasis on commercial aviation. The purpose of the study is to understand what capacity currently exists in aviation facilities and what will be needed to meet future demands for air transportation and increased economic opportunities. The study will also assist in promoting the effective use of federal, state, regional, and local aviation resources. High-speed passenger rail connections will also be evaluated as part of the study.

See Part 3 for details on all phases of this study and plan update.

Schedule: Underway—Targeted completion:
 Phase 1—completed on September 30, 2006
 Phase 2—July 1, 2007
 Phase 3—July 1, 2009

▶ Washington State Ferries

The Washington State Ferries Long-Range Strategic Plan should guide future WSF decisions on services and investments over the next 25 years. It serves as a 25-year strategic investment plan for vessel and terminal improvements will also have a route-specific program including route structures, frequencies and carrying capacities.

The Washington Transportation Plan will result in strategic system improvements to increase capacity and reduce delay. As part of its System Plan update within the framework of the Washington Transportation Plan, Washington State Ferries (WSF) is assessing and defining options for ferry service reconfiguration to meet increasing travel demand.

Schedule: The Draft Ferry System Plan public comment review period ended on July 31, 2006. The final plan is expected to be adopted in early 2007.

▶ System Tolling Study

The Transportation Commission conducted a comprehensive tolling study which addressed the following eight key questions on tolling:

1. What role can tolling play in developing and managing Washington's transportation system?
2. How should Washington decide which parts of the system to toll or price?
3. What rules should govern the use of toll revenue?
4. What rules should govern setting toll rates?
5. What is the most appropriate governance and organizational structure?
6. How do technology and toll operations influence toll policy?
7. How do equity, fairness, and uniformity issues influence toll policy?
8. What are the implications of alternative toll policies at the Tacoma Narrows Bridge?

Provide guidance for when to use tolling as a tool to increase transportation system performance and reliability. Establish a single user experience "one device, one phone number, one statement."

Note: Further information about the details of this study is included in Part 3.

Adopted on September 19, 2006.

Mobility Continued

Action

Outcome

▶ Future Funding

In cooperation with the Governor’s Office, the Department of Revenue, and the Office of Financial Management, the Department of Transportation should propose options for a transportation funding strategy based on alternative fuels.

New source of transportation funding, to offset a portion of revenues lost annually by reduction in gas and diesel fuel consumption by fuel efficient vehicles.

▶ Passenger Rail

Update strategy for intercity passenger rail system expansion.

Improve consistency between available funding and expansion plans. Critical system expansion and operation improvements identified and future investments justified by benefits.

▶ Intercity Transportation and Basic Access

Define as policy the state’s role and the level of state investment in public transportation service to provide basic access and intercity transportation.

Clarify the state role for intercity transportation investment. Improve connections between rural and urban centers. Intercity transportation provides a vital link between rural communities and urban areas. This will provide a framework that can be used to develop programs that address basic connectivity between communities, define goals for connecting rural areas to urban service centers, and reduce rural isolation. The policy will also provide the local communities and service providers a clear vision of the state’s interest in intercity transportation, and allow these partners to participate in meeting the needs.

Mobility, Continued

Action

Outcome

Corridor Efficiency

The Department of Transportation, in cooperation with Washington State Transit Association and others, should develop a strategy for closer integration between roadway and transit operations, including exploring innovative approaches to access management

Public transportation improves the efficiency of the highway system by moving more people with fewer vehicles, improves person throughput on congested corridors, and provides travel options beyond a single occupancy vehicle.

Travel Conservation Approaches

The Department of Transportation should identify needed policy adjustments to ensure continued effectiveness of the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) system.

More efficient movement of roadway system for increased capacity, improved air quality, and improved travel times and reliability.

Park-and-Ride Lots for Corridor Efficiency

Demand for parking at lots in congested corridors is high and many facilities are at or over capacity. The lack of available parking along these critical highways affects the efficiency of the highway system. The Department of Transportation's Office of Transit Mobility, in cooperation with the Washington State Transit Association and others, should develop a strategy for determining the state role in park-and-ride facilities, particularly lots that improve highway efficiency on congested corridors.

Park-and-ride lots strategically located on key highway corridors are integral to improving the efficiency of the system. The facilities work in conjunction with other highway system investments including HOV lanes and direct access ramps.

Development and implementation of a park-and-ride policy will help define the role of the state and improve the efficiency of our transportation system. This policy will serve as a guide for a long-term park-and-ride lot program. Prevent loss of existing park-and-ride lots. Add capacity where most needed.

New Technologies and Alternative Fuels

Work closely with the Governor's Office, the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, and the Department of Ecology to develop a strategy to adapt to the demand for alternative vehicles and fuels.

Adapt the transportation system to serve evolving needs. The transportation system is based on sustainable fuel supplies.

Environmental Quality and Health

Commission Policies

- Meet environmental responsibilities.
- Minimize, and avoid when practical, air, water, and noise pollution; energy usage; use of hazardous materials; flood impacts; and impacts on wetlands and heritage resources from transportation activities.
- When practical, and consistent with other priorities, protect, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats and wetlands impacted by transportation facilities.
- Coordinate and take the lead in partnering with other agencies on environmental issues affecting transportation to reduce costs and increase effectiveness.
- Transportation plans and actions will support and encourage partnering with local communities to achieve our mutual interests in promoting livable communities.

Action

Outcome

Tribal Consultation

The Department of Transportation and the Regional Transportation Planning Organizations should work together to improve implementation of the Centennial Accord and create additional guidance for tribal consultation for transportation planning.

Improved communication will identify issues early in project development so that project teams can reduce conflict or delay.

Path and Trails

The Department of Transportation should work with the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation and the Regional Transportation Planning Organizations to develop a strategy for path and trail investments, similar to state pedestrian program investments.

Improve safety and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists. Improve coordination between local comprehensive plans and the WTP.

Healthy Communities

The Department of Transportation should coordinate with the Growth Management Services Division of the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. The two departments should convene a task force to identify sources and ways of pooling funds in order to support local governments seeking assistance in addressing the Growth Management Act requirement to include a pedestrian and bicycle component in comprehensive plans.

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities and network constructed to provide for safe and healthy transportation options through walking and biking.

Environmental Quality and Health, Continued

Action

Outcome

Emissions Reduction

Working with the Department of Ecology, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Transportation should refine policy regarding the state's position and appropriate role in reducing freight-related diesel emissions.

Identify strategies and solutions that minimize adverse air quality impacts of freight-related diesel emissions, while ensuring continued freight mobility and support of freight dependent industries. Develop a program and pilot structure based on the strategic plan and its policy direction. Coordinate with regional, state, and national groups to refine strategies and advance pilot projects in Washington.

Reduce adverse side effects of diesel-related emissions, including air pollution and health risks. Prioritize the numerous strategies and technologies that may help reduce harmful emissions. Ensure continued support of an efficient freight transportation system, where strategies and programs enhance industry and carrier needs. Reduce toxic emissions. Improve fuel efficiency.

