Transportation and Land Use

Historically, the type and availability of transportation has had a major influence in defining the physical structure of our communities. Communities have evolved from being oriented around ports, rivers, canals, and railroads, to a pattern now dominated by the roadway. In turn, where we live, work, recreate, and find goods and services all drive transportation demand. Community design, social, political, and economic activity, and transportation are intertwined.

Traffic congestion, travel delays, unreliable travel times, and reduced safety can occur when demand exceeds roadway or transit capacity.

Transportation problems can be exacerbated when:

- People perceive that the only available and apparently affordable housing they desire is miles, cities, and even counties away from jobs, schools, shopping, and recreation.
- Businesses relocate to the suburban fringe, creating "edge cities" and stranding their transit-dependent employees because traditional transit systems do not typically provide effective service in the "reverse-commute" direction or from suburb to suburb.

Transportation problems cannot be solved solely by building additional roadways, interchanges, transit lines and stations, or intercity and commuter railway capacity.

These actions can address some congestion in the short-term and are very important, but developing a transportation system to improve Washington State's mobility that is sustainable, environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically viable requires recognizing that:

- Transportation problems are symptoms of underlying individual and community decisions.
- "Sprawl" development has infrastructure cost implications and travel cost and time implications that can directly affect housing affordability and quality of life. No one actually wants to commute several hours a day in congested traffic or considers the event life-enriching. People do it to gain other real and perceived benefits.
- Many metropolitan area issues, including transportation and affordable housing, are regional and sometimes interregional in nature. Addressing these issues requires unprecedented levels of government cooperation and shared vision.

Transportation funds are collected from the public with the expectation that they will be used to meet transportation needs. There are more transportation needs and desires than there are funds to support them. Any expenditure of transportation funds must have a reasonable link to improving mobility and access for people, goods, services, and information.

However, since transportation and community development are interconnected, the availability and location of housing, especially affordable housing, can have a positive impact on reducing overall transportation demand and increase the use and effectiveness of the transportation system. The appropriate investment of transportation funds in projects and services can foster affordable housing and yield a long-term transportation benefit.

Transportation investments can support the vitality and redevelopment of urban areas and first-ring suburbs. This includes brownfield and grayfield areas, where infrastructure already exists and affordable housing can be developed. Such redevelopment can serve to increase transit usage and efficiency. It can also promote walking and bicycling.

Local agencies can use their discretionary transportation funds, such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality and Transportation Enhancement and Regional Surface Transportation Program funding, to help support transit-oriented development, redevelopment, and affordable housing development. Local agency-provided transportation improvements can offset some of the total cost of transit-oriented development or other development that includes affordable housing.

State transportation investments can be prioritized with the intent of targeting areas where local investments in transportation facilities, transit services, and local decisions on development help to increase the long-term return on the state's transportation investment. Transportation planning funds can be used to jointly plan transportation services and community development to maximize return on future investments and ensure the transportation system complements community growth and vitality.

Transportation and Land Use—Key Challenges

Washington State citizens often talk about the challenges facing the transportation systems in the next twenty years, including sprawl, quality of life, and the threats to natural ecosystems and salmon.

Confronting these issues is central to creating forward-looking programs for transportation investment. There is no question that efficient transportation systems are essential to economic vitality. There is no question that individualized free market choices about housing, work, and lifestyles are influencing transportation and land use with greater force than either independently influences the other. And there is no question that failure of transportation systems to meet the needs of growing communities can trigger social and environmental costs, including poor land use outcomes.

Although since implementation of the GMA the state as a whole has begun to coordinate growth and transportation and address congestion more effectively, there remains much to learn about what mix of incentives and disincentives will improve the mobility of people and goods. It may take more serious efforts at partnership between governments and businesses to address land use and the everyday decisions people make about where to work, live, and recreate.

> "Encourage development in areas where public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner."
>
> ***Palouse RTPO***
> *2005 Regional Transportation Plan*

Growth Management

Transportation systems are costly public investments. Land use decisions made by local jurisdictions are key determinants of how the state's transportation system serves people, communities, and the economy. Transportation, in turn, helps define the physical structure of our communities.

When passed in 1990, the Growth Management Act included 13 far-reaching goals to guide local comprehensive plans and development regulations. (A fourteenth goal for shorelines was added later.) The basic principle of the Growth Management Act is that new development should be allowed only at a pace that public agencies providing public services such as roads, water, and sewer systems can keep up with. Local jurisdictions planning under the Growth Management Act implemented these statewide goals with flexibility to make their own choices about growth and development.

Transportation investments must be made in support of growth management strategies or growth management cannot succeed.

Our state's Growth Management Act (GMA) created a framework rooted in local government for reconciling the pressures from growth on the uses of land with the consequent demands for public infrastructure investment. Since the GMA passed, we have seen improved consistency and public engagement in our local land use decisions as a direct result of the coordinated planning required by the law. Major elements of the GMA are:

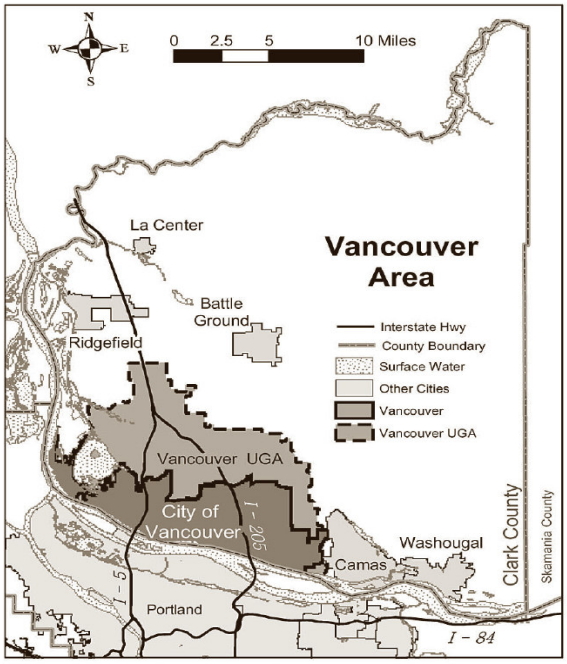
- Comprehensive Plans
- Urban Growth Areas
- Concurrency

Comprehensive Plans

Fast-growing counties and the cities within them are required to create comprehensive plans that include several plan elements addressing projected changes in land use and public facilities. Cities and counties have discretion in their comprehensive plans to make many choices about how to plan for and accommodate

growth. The local transportation system is part of the infrastructure needed to support the land use element of the comprehensive plan. Regional Transportation Planning Organizations certify the transportation element of local comprehensive plans for consistency with regional goals.

Urban Growth Areas
Jurisdictions preparing comprehensive plans are also required to designate Urban Growth Areas (UGA) where future population growth and infill development is to be encouraged and outside of which growth should occur only if it is rural in character. The purpose of the UGA is to attract and funnel growth to certain core areas, increasing density there while maintaining the rural character of the land outside the UGA.



Vancouver and surrounding area. Source: Vancouver GIS.

Development Encroachment
Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) also requires local jurisdictions to discourage incompatible development adjacent to public use airports through comprehensive plan policies and development regulations. The airport may no longer be able to function if nearby development creates an unsafe setting for planes taking off and landing. Incompatible development can affect both the short-term and long-term operational capabilities of the airport, impact airport capacity, cause safety implications for people in the air and on the ground, impact noise sensitive uses, affect navigation, and impair the utility of the airport as an economic resource. Airports are recognized under GMA as Essential Public Facilities.

Growth Management Goals

- Focus urban growth in urban areas
- Reduce sprawl
- Provide efficient transportation
- Encourage affordable housing
- Encourage sustainable economic development
- Protect property rights
- Process permits in a timely and fair manner
- Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries
- Retain open space and habitat areas and develop recreation opportunities
- Protect the environment
- Encourage citizen participation and regional coordination
- Ensure adequate public facilities and services
- Preserve important historic resources
- Manage shorelines wisely

WSDOT encourages ports, special districts, airport sponsors, aviation interests, and local jurisdictions to form partnerships and to work together to discourage incompatible development. The Aviation Division provides research documentation and best management practices and tools that can be used by local jurisdictions and airports to address land use compatibility adjacent to airports.

Similarly, Washington's seaports, highways, rail lines, and distribution centers are vital links to the global economy. The compatibility of these facilities with neighboring communities can affect Washington State's ability to move products for export and serve as a gateway for imported goods.

Concurrency
Transportation and land use decisions continue to shape Washington State's quality of life. In 1990, when the legislature passed the growth management act, transportation planning across regional boundaries and the topic of concurrency were included.

Concurrency refers to the timely provision of public facilities and services relative to the demand for them. To maintain concurrency means that adequate public facilities are in place to serve new development as it occurs. The Growth Management Act (GMA) gives special attention to concurrency for transportation. The GMA requires that transportation improvements or strategies to accommodate development impacts need to be made concurrently with land development.

"Concurrency" is defined by the GMA to mean that any needed improvements or strategies are in place at the time of development or that a financial commitment exists to complete the improvements or strategies within six years. Local governments have many choices about how to apply concurrency within their plans, regulations, and permit systems.

If concurrency cannot be demonstrated, then local jurisdictions are required to enforce adopted ordinances, which prohibit development approval unless transportation improvements or strategies to accommodate the impacts of development are made concurrent with the development.

Most local governments have comprehensive plans that include level of service (LOS) standards. If levels of service fall below those described in the transportation chapter of the local comprehensive plan, then corrective action is needed. Concurrency is managed at the local level through ordinances consistent with the standards and policies in the locally adopted comprehensive plans. Sprawl happens in several areas for various reasons. Counties fully planning under the GMA have concurrency requirements as well the cities and their LOS standards are often lower in urban areas. To reduce inconsistency between neighboring jurisdictions and to consider regional implications of comprehensive plans, local plans are reviewed and certified by metropolitan planning organizations and regional transportation planning organizations.

Because state highways serve as primary arterials for many local governments, establishing and maintaining a comprehensive level of service for local governments and the state continues to be an ongoing challenge. In 1998, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1487, relating to transportation and growth management planning. House Bill 1487, known as the Level of Service (LOS) Bill, was passed to enhance the identification and coordinated planning for major transportation facilities identified as "transportation facilities and services of statewide significance." LOS for Highways of Statewide Significance (HSS) is set by WSDOT, however, these facilities are not subject to local concurrency requirements under the GMA. Non-HSS facilities have LOS set by WSDOT in consultation with the RTPOs. The GMA does not address whether or not these facilities are subject to local concurrency requirements. Applicability of concurrency to state highways and ferry routes continues to surface as a policy discussion.

Two legislative studies underway in 2006 address concurrency. These studies include an examination of whether the concurrency goal should apply to state-owned transportation facilities and how multimodal systems such as transit contribute to concurrency goals. These studies present a timely opportunity to discuss the Growth Management Act's concurrency requirement as it relates to statewide transportation needs. Both projects are in development and will be submitted to the Legislature by December, 2006.

Multimodal Concurrency Study

The multimodal transportation concurrency study requires WSDOT and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to coordinate efforts to deliver a study that examines multimodal transportation improvements and strategies to comply with the concurrency requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The study request calls for analyzing approaches to concurrency that better integrate roadway and transit planning, maintain the ability to attain development objectives of growth centers, and allow for tailoring of Level of Service standards to different growth centers and travel periods. Technical assistance is provided by the Washington State Transportation Research Center (TRAC). For more information, see www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/concurrency/MultimodalStudy.htm.

State-Owned Transportation Facilities Analysis

The state-owned transportation facilities study directs WSDOT to conduct an analysis of expanding the statewide transportation concurrency requirements. It includes development impacts on LOS standards applicable to state-owned transportation facilities, including state highways and state ferry routes. The analysis will examine gaps in law and practice that strengthen state and local transportation planning. The Legislative objective of the analysis is to ensure that jurisdictional divisions do not defeat growth management concurrency goals.

Growth Management Act Planning Goals

The following goals are adopted to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations of those counties and cities that are required or choose to plan under RCW 36.70A.040. The following goals are not listed in order of priority and shall be used exclusively for the purpose of guiding the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations:

(1) Urban growth. Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.

(2) Reduce sprawl. Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.

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

(4) Housing. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.

(5) Economic development. Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.

(6) Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.

(7) Permits. Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

(8) Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.

(9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.

(10) Environment. Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

(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.

(13) Historic preservation. Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance.

(14) Manage Shorelines wisely