

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

What is a Regional Transportation Plan?

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) serves as a strategic blueprint for the region's transportation system. It provides an overall analysis of how transportation will work in the region over a 20 year time frame and supports coordination among jurisdictions. It also acts as an important tool in meeting state and federal transportation requirements, ensuring continued funding from these sources. The RTP identifies those projects and issues that change the way traffic flows throughout the region, complementing the local planning that makes the roadway network function within each jurisdiction.

Transportation planning is closely related to land use planning – a chicken and egg relationship. Which comes first – where people live and work, or where roads are located for traveling to home and work? In truth, each has a powerful influence on the other, and on the way the community looks and functions.

The regional transportation planning process, in the form it's taken over the last decade, is closely related to land use planning, both by legislation and common understanding. The RTP is based upon the regional land use forecast that predicts how many residents will call the Thurston region home in 2025, as well as where they will live and work. The population and employment forecast information is then used to develop a sophisticated transportation model, calibrated to real life, that predicts where and how we will travel during certain periods of the day – morning, midday, and evening rush hour.

This information is analyzed in coordination with local transportation plans to create a list of “regionally significant” projects – those projects that support major travel routes in the region. Built or implemented by state, city, county, tribal, transit and port agencies, these projects are spread across many jurisdictions and can greatly impact the way traffic moves in a local area. Hence, the RTP provides a regional look, but actual projects still fall on individual entities to execute.

Executive Summary

Past Plans and Accomplishments

The 2025 RTP is the third in a recent series of transportation plans. In the early 90's, the state adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA) and the federal government implemented the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). This prompted the first RTP of the current series, "Transportation Futures 2010 – Making Connections" adopted in 1993, that helped shape the local comprehensive land use plans required by GMA. Major themes of this plan were developing high density, well-designed, mixed-use urban forms, connecting existing infrastructure, and reducing the evening rush hour drive alone rate.

The RTP was updated in 1998 with "TransAction 2020," which heralded a number of firsts – incorporated adopted land use plans and forecasts, recognized that adding capacity won't necessarily solve congestion, and required the projects included in the RTP be financially constrained by reasonable projections of future revenue.

Projects

"Transportation Futures 2010" and "TransAction 2020" laid the foundation for a \$309 million investment in transportation projects in the region between 1993 and 2001. This includes completed projects (60%), projects underway, and projects with committed funding. Federal, state and local sources contributed roughly equal shares to finance these investments. The largest investments were in capacity, maintenance, preservation and replacement projects. Safety, efficiency and non-motorized capacity projects also received substantial investments.

In the period from 1993 to 2001, 341 projects were initiated. Private development contributed to many of these projects and completed other local improvements not reflected in the project total. Of these projects, 112 included bike and pedestrian improvements. The 39 regionally significant projects identified in "Transportation Futures 2010" and/or "TransAction 2020," represent a \$140 million investment.

Examples of some major investments:

- 4th/5th Avenue Bridge Reconstructions
- Regional Overlay and Resurfacing
- I-5 Widening from Maytown to 93rd
- I-5 Marvin Road Interchange Expansion
- Pacific Avenue/Lacey Boulevard One-Way Couplets

Executive Summary

- Olympia Transit Center
- Bald Hills Road Realignments and Upgrade
- Tumwater Boulevard (Airdustrial Way) Upgrades
- Chehalis -Western Trail Development

See Appendix J for more information on projects developed between 1993 and 2001.

Other smaller investments also made important improvements:

- Installing bike lockers at Capital High School.
- Adding flashing beacons to North Thurston School crosswalks.

TDM

During this period the region established and expanded the Travel Demand Management Program (TDM), aimed at encouraging alternatives to driving alone, such as biking, walking, riding transit, carpooling, vanpooling, working from home, and changing work schedules. TDM supports a variety of purposes – increasing road capacity, reducing commute trips, managing traffic in construction zones, and changing travel patterns to schools.

Transit

Also during this time, transit increased substantially in the region, only to lose 40% of its funding base through state initiatives and legislative actions. While service continued, it was necessarily reduced. The service area was refocused to the urban core of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater, with connecting service to Yelm. Local support for transit, in the form of a voter approved sales tax increase, helped to re-establish service that had been cut. Ongoing efforts are underway to rebuild the fleet, improve passenger amenities and bring service back to previous levels.

Trails

Large sections of the regional trail network were established in this period, many using abandoned rail lines. The regional trail network, in addition to supplying recreational opportunities, serves as an important component of the transportation system, providing connections among our communities and reconnecting communities divided by development of I-5 and US 101. The “Bridging the Gap” project, a collective effort to connect the northern and southern portions of the Chehalis-Western Trail at I-5, Martin Way and Pacific Avenue, was started.

Executive Summary

Technology and Special Needs

Policy makers also initiated programs in several emerging fields – Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to better use new transportation technologies; Special Needs Transportation to support youth, elders, people with disabilities and economically disadvantaged residents who were especially hard hit by transit service reductions; and Environmental Justice review to identify and address disproportionately high adverse effects of transportation projects on minority and low income populations.

The 2025 Plan

What the Plan Does

The 2025 Regional Transportation Plan is an update of the 2010 and 2020 plans. It extends the forecast timeframe of the transportation and land use models to 2025 and assesses the changes and progress since the last plan. Continuing many of the past themes, the 2025 Plan stays within existing revenue, prioritizes safety, preservation, efficiency and operations, and invests in multiple modes of transportation – creating choice. This Plan also outlines a series of critical regional issues to address in the next few years.

What the Plan Doesn't Do

The 2025 Plan does not solve congestion. The community will continue to grow, becoming increasingly urban and suburban in nature, resulting in some congestion. The impacts of congestion, however, can be mitigated. It's not inexpensive, not without limited environmental impacts, and not replete with all the desirable choices. The 2025 Plan balances mobility, cost, environmental impact and choice.

The 2025 RTP details many areas for further study. Addressing these enormous issues will take time, so answers are not included in the 2025 RTP. Clearly stating the issues in the RTP, however, is a significant step, to be followed by the creation of work groups to tackle these tough issues.

Values

In its Guiding Principles, Goals and Policies, and Environmental Considerations, the 2025 RTP establishes a foundation of values that shape the regional and local transportation projects,

Executive Summary

studies and programs. The 2025 RTP proposes a transportation system that offers safe, efficient, affordable travel choices for people and goods, reflecting land use plans and long-term quality-of-life objectives, transportation decisions and investments. It is supportive, responsive, fiscally responsible, safety conscious, environmentally sensitive, collaborative, and provides choice.

Key Issues

Land use and performance measures were key components in developing the alternatives considered in the 2025 RTP. The RTP explored the impacts of modest changes in population distribution on the transportation system. Overall, these changes had little impact on future regional travel, although increasing density in urban areas shifted a significant number of trips to walking, biking and transit in those areas. The Plan notes that of all the housing that will exist in 2025, 40% will be built between now and 2025. Changes in the pattern of land use and transportation – to mitigate congestion, improve safety, and increase efficiency – may be possible, but require more in-depth analysis.

The 2025 RTP also investigated additional performance measures, including mode split, time-of-day modeling, vehicle miles traveled, and corridor travel time or speed. While additional work is needed to meaningfully interpret and apply these performance measures, some messages were clear:

- Travel time between most points will increase.
- Between the rural south County and the city centers, a large a.m. in-bound commute and a corresponding p.m. out-bound commute will occur.
- Average vehicle miles traveled will increase.
- How land use develops will influence mode split, particularly in urban areas.

Recommendations: Regionally Significant Issues to Address

The 2025 RTP identified a series of issues to explore which will form the basis for much of TRPC's transportation work program in the intervening years before the next plan update.

- Better integrating transportation and land use planning.
- Selecting performance measures that best evaluate the entire multimodal system.

See Chapter 4 Alternatives
for more information.

Executive Summary

- Establishing equitable and sustainable methods to pay for the transportation system.
- Deciding the role rail will play in the region's transportation future.
- Improving freight movement.
- Designing and building a regional trail system.
- Better involving the region's citizens and policy makers in the transportation decision-making process.

Recommendations: Regionally Significant Projects

Regionally significant projects include capacity, new connection, transit, and state highway system projects. Retained and expanded from the 2020 plan is the concept of assessment areas, where widening roads to add capacity may not be possible due to physical constraints, or may not make sense for other reasons. These are areas to watch and study, developing an appropriate array of solutions for the challenges they present. In this category, the 2025 RTP adds several rural road assessment areas. Regional analysis showed large a.m. and p.m. migrations into and out of the urban areas along these rural roads, yet road widening may not be a feasible solution.

The region's top priorities remain safety, efficiency and preservation of the existing transportation system. Many of the 100+ projects and studies support these priorities, even ones that add capacity or otherwise modify the network. The regionally significant projects:

- Expand the existing system to provide more capacity (27 projects).
- Add new connections and realign existing roadways to provide more capacity and improve system efficiency (15 projects).
- Study and develop projects for corridors and focused areas of the road network to improve mobility and access (14 studies).
- Assess areas where adding capacity may not be possible or appropriate to determine the best response (16 studies).
- Restore and expand transit services and facilities (7 projects and studies).

Executive Summary

- Expand the regional trail system (5 projects and studies).
- Extend the use and integration of transportation technologies (8 projects and studies).
- Expand, improve access to, and better manage the state highway system in the region (12 projects and studies).

Much of this work will begin in the next 3 to 5 years, the planning horizon of the next Plan update.

Constraints: Fiscal

The 2025 RTP is required to be fiscally constrained and meets that requirement. The financial forecast for the 2025 RTP runs from 2000 to 2025, with a total estimated expense of building and maintaining the transportation system during that time of \$1.7 billion. This expense can be accommodated within the revenues projected for the 25 year planning horizon.

Expense (2000 to 2025)	Estimated Cost (in \$ millions)
Streets, Roads, and Bridges	1,070
<i>Locally Significant Projects</i>	289
<i>Maintenance, Preservation & Operations</i>	459
<i>Administration</i>	144
<i>Regionally Significant Projects</i>	178
Public Transportation	632
Total Expenses	1,702

Note: The majority of funding for public transportation comes from revenue only available to transit.

Constraints: Air Quality Conformity

The 2025 RTP demonstrates conformity with all state and federal air quality requirements pertaining to PM10. PM10 is generated by many sources, primarily wood smoke and transportation. (PM10 is particulate matter less than 10 microns in aerodynamic diameter.) Appendix H demonstrates that regionally significant projects included in the 2025 Plan do not cause PM10 levels to exceed healthy limits – or even come close to those limits. Air quality is generally very good in Thurston County improving measurably since the late 1980s. Much of the improvement can be attributed to a steady decrease in particulate matter generated by wood smoke. The highest annual readings for particulate matter in the region have remained well below the national standard since 1990.

See Chapter 2 Recommendations for more detail.

See Chapter 5 Finance for additional information.

See Chapter 6 Environmental Considerations and Appendix H Air Quality Conformity for more information.

Executive Summary

Next Steps – Guiding Our Future

The 2025 RTP envisions the future transportation system and guides our steps today in making that system a reality. Projects will be prioritized and implemented by local and state entities responsible for building and maintaining the transportation system. The public will be encouraged to participate in all levels of planning – with an emphasis on underserved populations. Limited regionally allocated funds will be distributed to priority projects. Work groups will form to answer the regionally significant questions posed in the Plan. The 2025 RTP serves as a vital blueprint, both in setting regional direction and focusing near term work priorities.