

Executive Summary

By 2050, Thurston County is expected to be home to more than 400,000 people — a 33 percent increase over the next 25 years. *What Moves You* serves as a strategic blueprint for the Thurston region's transportation system.

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) takes the long view. Looking 25 years into the future, the RTP considers what our community's transportation needs may be in the coming decades and how to meet them.

The RTP is divided into seven chapters:

- Introduction
- Recommendations
- Guiding Principles, Goals, and Policies
- WSDOT Facilities
- Future Conditions
- Finance
- Environmental Considerations

COVID-19 Pandemic and the RTP

In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023), Governor Inslee issued a series of proclamations and declarations aimed at reducing the spread of the virus in Washington state, including requiring all non-essential workers stay home and stay healthy. As a result, significant changes in how/whether people travel in the Thurston region occurred, even after the pandemic ended. The data and statistics used in this plan were developed during and after the outbreak. Both the transportation model and financial forecast take into account the radical changes in transportation choices that occurred. The push and pull between flexible work schedules, opportunities to work from home, and return-to-office mandates means transportation patterns remain in flux.

Introduction

Beyond a simple statement of purpose, the RTP serves many functions — from implementing local plans (such as Sustainable Thurston) to balancing social, financial, and environmental impacts, to acknowledging the diversity of transportation needs in our region.

The RTP fulfills both state and federal requirements for transportation planning at the regional level.

2020 to 2025: What's Changed?

There have been a few major changes to this Plan since 2020:

- **Focus on People.** Language throughout the plan has been updated to be more inclusive, put people first, and focus attention on transportation system users. Imagery has also been updated to be more inclusive.
 - **Recommendations.** Two recommendations have been added to the Plan and the project list has been updated:
 - **Safe System.** Prioritize projects that reduce conflicts between transportation system users (pedestrians, transit riders, drivers, etc.) and eliminate fatal and serious injury crashes.
 - **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction and Climate Change Resilience.** Reduce locally generated greenhouse gas emissions and increase the resilience of our transportation system to climate-related impacts.
 - **Project List.** The project list, which makes up the bulk of this Plan's recommendations, has been updated:
 - Ten completed projects were removed from the project list.
 - Two projects were removed from the project list because they were no longer needed.
 - Nineteen new projects were added to the project list, including four capacity projects, two new street connection projects, one Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) project, five studies, and seven Intercity Transit projects.
- See Chapter 2: Recommendations, and Appendix J: Regional Project List Detail, for more information on the project list.
- **Future Conditions.** The future conditions chapter was reorganized by mode to provide a more in-depth analysis and a fuller discussion of assessment areas.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

- Address 20+ year planning horizon
- Include short- and long-range strategies
- Review and update every 4 or 5 years, depending on air quality conformity status
- Include performance measures

COMBINED REQUIREMENTS

- Address all modes of travel
- Preserve existing system
- Make efficient use of system
- Reflect long-range land use plans
- Model future travel demand
- Identify projects and strategies
- Conform with air quality rules
- Address environmental impacts
- Be financially feasible
- Promote public involvement
- Use performance measures to evaluate system

STATE REQUIREMENTS

- Reflect countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and the Washington State Transportation Plan
- Include goals, objectives, and land use assumptions
- Establish level of service standards
- Review at least every 2 years to ensure plan is up to date

Our region's geographical factors draw people to the area but also constrain where development occurs. The weather and latitude — with gray days and long winter nights — require a transportation system with safe, well lit, well maintained, clearly marked sidewalks, roads, crosswalks, and trails.

Our region continues to grow at one of the fastest rates in the state. Such growth challenges our ability to plan for a changing population and issues of equity, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, public transportation, technology, and climate

change. We also need to plan for funding our transportation system and collaborating with our legislators to make sure our highest priorities are taken care of.

In the end, the biggest challenge to planning 25 years into the future is striking the right balance — between individual and community needs, short- and long-term strategies, impacts weighed against benefits, urban and rural considerations, and investing now and sustaining the future.

Recommendations

Recommendations developed under the framework of the guiding principles, goals, and policies address the region's transportation needs over the next 25 years.

Each of the recommendations supports one or more of the plan's goals and policies. The recommendations in this Plan fall into four general categories: a safe system; greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate change resilience; maintenance and preservation; and regional projects.

Safe System. In 2023, 4,093 crashes in the Thurston region resulted in the deaths of 34 people and the serious injury of another 113. In addition to the very real impacts crashes resulting in fatalities and serious injuries have on individuals and families, they also have significant impacts on public safety, choices in travel mode, traffic flow, and the overall efficiency of the transportation network.

Death and serious injury are not acceptable outcomes of using our transportation system and therefore must be addressed in all aspects of our transportation work. Eliminating fatal and serious injury crashes will require consideration of how people interact with the design of our transportation system.

Regional Safety Action Plan

In 2025, TRPC began developing a comprehensive safety action plan for the Thurston region. The project will establish a safety task force, conduct a safety analysis, identify specific policy and process changes that can be made, and develop a list of priority projects and strategies to improve and prioritize the safety of all users.

Several local jurisdictions received federal funding in 2023 to update their safety plans. This project will build on those efforts.

TRPC anticipates updating the Regional Transportation Plan in the future to incorporate the findings of the safety analysis and relevant strategies and policies from the Regional Safety Action Plan once complete.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction and Climate Change Resilience.

Greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector constitute 36 percent of the Thurston region's total emissions — second only to buildings and energy use. As the Thurston region continues to grow, low-emission transportation will become even more important. To achieve the region's goal of an 85% reduction of 2015 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2050, people will need to drive less, use transit more, continue to telework, use more fuel-efficient vehicles, and use active forms of transportation like walking and biking.

Maintenance and Preservation.

Between 2025 and 2050, Thurston region communities are expected to spend over \$50 million a year maintaining and preserving 1,600 miles of local public roadways. As of 2024, approximately 92 percent of local roadways in the Thurston region were in good or very good condition. With regular maintenance, these roadways can remain in good condition indefinitely. The remaining eight percent are in fair or poor condition and will eventually need to be rebuilt.

Preserving and maintaining public transportation service is also vital to the region's transportation system. Efficiency measures — such as Transportation Demand Management — help increase the functional life of our transportation infrastructure.

Regional Projects. Regional projects include specific construction projects, programs, and preliminary studies that impact travel over a large area. The funding to construct/complete such projects must be available or reasonably anticipated (i.e., fiscally constrained). A total of 79 projects representing an investment of more than \$2 billion are included in this plan:

- 19 capacity projects: \$351 million
- 15 new connections and alignments: \$247 million
- Six trail projects: \$73 million
- 14 public transportation projects and studies: \$164 million
- Five Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) projects and studies: more than \$1.1 billion
- 20 studies (including 13 TRPC studies): \$8.5 million

Guiding Principles, Goals, and Policies

The Regional Transportation Plan is founded on essential values that are true throughout the region, even if their expression may differ between city and town, port and transit, tribal nation and state, urban and rural, civilian and military. These shared values guide our region's decisions:

- **Safety conscious**, making the system safer for all users.
- **Sustainable**, balancing needs today and in the future.
- **Supportive**, improving access for people of all backgrounds.
- **Responsive**, maximizing future opportunities while recognizing today's realities.
- **Fiscally responsible**, making wise system investments.
- **Environmentally sensitive** to our social, natural, and built settings.
- **Collaborative** in making informed, strategic choices.

Goals and Policies translate the region's Guiding Principles into a more detailed framework for transportation decision-making at all levels of government. The RTP includes 20 goals in four topic areas:

- **Transportation Relationships.** Three goals describe transportation's most essential relationships between various modes of transportation; their connection to land use; and people's ability to easily navigate the transportation system.
- **System Management.** Five goals describe the essential functions associated with owning and operating the transportation system.
- **System Components.** Seven goals describe the various modes of transportation and how they play a part in our region.
- **Process.** Five goals describe the various processes that are integral to transportation decision-making in our region.





More than 100 policies have been identified to aid in implementing these goals.

WSDOT Facilities

The Thurston region has seven state facilities including Interstate 5 (I-5), U.S. 101, and State Route 507. These routes are an integral part of the region's transportation system. Based on 2018 estimates, WSDOT's Olympic Region needs \$13 million more in funding each year just to keep up with preservation and maintenance needs for state facilities in the Thurston region. With a growing population and new technologies, WSDOT and local government approaches to managing the entire transportation system are evolving to find innovative ways to address such funding shortfalls. As WSDOT and local transportation partners in the region collaborate, they can implement innovative, timely, and cost-effective solutions to help keep us all moving.

WSDOT strives to provide safe, reliable, and cost-effective transportation options. WSDOT's core responsibility is to preserve the structural integrity of the state highway system, thereby keeping the most heavily used roads in our region open to the traveling public. Maintaining a state of good repair covers all aspects of the state transportation system, from road pavement to bridges to seismic preparedness to clearing snow and ice to caring for plantings alongside roads.

I-5 is the most important north-south freight corridor in the Puget Sound region, carrying more than 10 million tons of freight each year. Maintaining and preserving this vital route is critical to the state's economic well-being and to the economic strength of the communities it passes through and serves. Our region's anticipated growth over the next 25 years, combined with interstate improvements in Pierce County, led to a series of local planning efforts to identify near-, mid-, and long-range strategies that address congestion on I-5 between Mounts Road and Tumwater. Over the next few years, work on I-5 planning will continue and will result in stronger relationships with affected parties, improved delivery times for future I-5 projects, and more responsive and effective transportation solutions.

How Will the Thurston Region Change Between Now and 2050?	 106,000+ people	 52,000+ jobs
	 58,000+ housing units	 52,000+ living near transit

The Future of Our Transportation System

The Future Conditions chapter takes a broad look at the impacts the region’s forecasted population and employment growth will have on our transportation facilities. It also highlights implications for future travel patterns and environmental considerations. The RTP uses a set of regional travel demand models to quantify both current and future travel conditions.

The 2050 conditions described in this chapter give us a glimpse into the future of travel within Thurston County. The analysis indicates that:

- Growing population will lead to increased traffic volumes and changing transportation needs. The 79 RTP projects, which are part of this Plan’s recommendations, will help mitigate vehicle congestion associated with this growth.
- Our region’s planned land use and roadway capacity improvements alone will not be sufficient to meet regionally adopted targets, goals, or level of service standards:
 - The region is engaged in planning for a safe system, but we are not on track to see zero deaths and serious injuries on the region’s roads by 2030.
 - Jurisdictions are planning for future housing in areas supportive of transit, but we will fall short of meeting Sustainable Thurston land use targets.
 - The region is reducing its per capita VMT and greenhouse gas emissions and we’re on track to meet our mid-term targets eventually. However, the 2050 targets for both are still out of reach. Reductions in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and transportation-related emissions — which make up the second-largest source of emissions in the Thurston region — are critical to meeting both targets.
 - We are not on track to see the region increase the share of trips made by bicycling and walking.
 - We are not on track to see the region increase the share of trips made by transit.

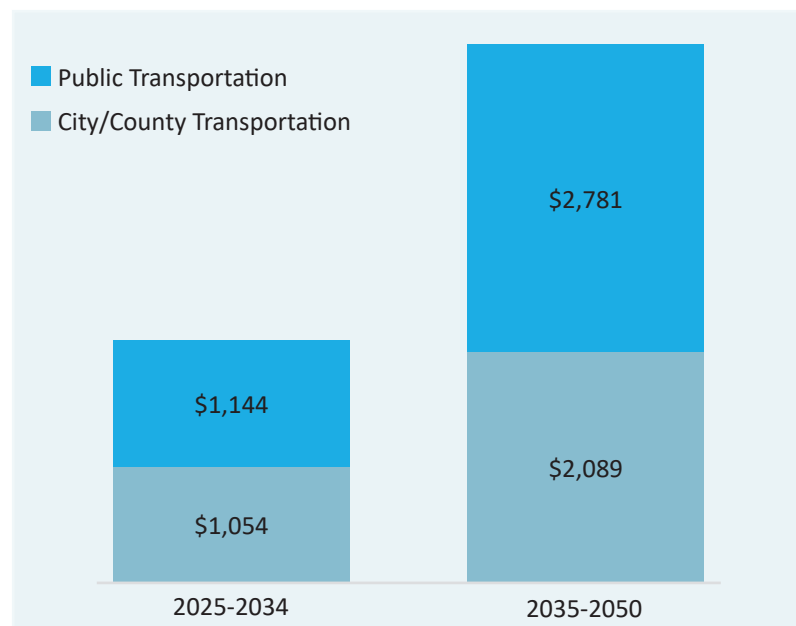
- We expect congestion to exceed accepted level of service for several locations on the regional road network by 2050.
- We can still make good progress on our regionally adopted targets and goals, which will help reduce level of service failures expected in the future.

Funding Transportation Improvements

Over the next 25 years, TRPC estimates that more than \$7 billion will be spent on the region's local transportation system. This doesn't include improvements to WSDOT facilities like Interstate 5, U.S. 101, and State Route 507.

Per state and federal law, the RTP must be a financially constrained plan, meaning it can only include projects the region can afford to complete with existing revenues or with revenues reasonably expected to be available. State law also requires the RTP to consider least cost planning. This means the region should factor all transportation costs and benefits into evaluating projects so that solutions result in the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people for the longest period of time at the lowest ultimate cost.

Figure ES-1: Thurston Region Transportation Expenditures, 2025–2050



Source: TRPC

We forecast revenues based on the various local, state, and federal funding sources local jurisdictions and transit providers use to support the infrastructure and services they provide.

We forecast expenditures based on funds needed to both maintain and expand the existing transportation system, including the following:

- Local construction
- Maintenance, preservation, and operations
- Administration
- Debt service
- Regional projects

By state and federal law, regional transportation projects cannot be included in local comprehensive plans and capital facilities plans unless they are also in the RTP. Without consistency between the local and regional plans, local jurisdictions cannot apply funding from development fees, federal grants, and most state grants toward the project.

Projects included in the RTP are not guaranteed to be funded; local jurisdictions have very little discretion over most of the money they use to fund big projects, and it generally falls to granting agencies to make most funding decisions.

Environmental Considerations

This chapter highlights some of the central environmental issues raised by projects included in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Consideration of the environmental impacts of the RTP expands well beyond the discussion in this chapter. Each project will undergo environmental analysis prior to building.

It is helpful to consider our environmental impacts in four distinct layers:

- **Natural Environment:** How transportation choices impact air quality, water quality, and habitat.
- **Built Environment:** How we use land and travel upon it, as well as historic and cultural preservation.
- **Social Environment:** How disproportionate environmental and health impacts have affected personal health and people's access to transportation system options.
- **Climate Change:** How transportation choices and investments impact — and are impacted by — climate change.

These core concepts are consistent with those in the Sustainable Thurston Plan. Therefore, the goals, targets, and actions in the Sustainable Thurston Plan related to air quality, water quality, habitat, energy, land use, and transportation are consistent with the RTP's goals and policies.