

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Background

Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) is the public agency leading long-term regional planning for the Thurston region. Decision-makers from 23 jurisdictions and organizations in the Thurston region comprise the Council, TRPC's governing body. TRPC is a Regional Transportation Organization (RTPO) as designated by Washington state, as well as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as designated by the federal government. In fulfillment of its responsibilities as both an RTPO and MPO, TRPC leads the collaborative effort of developing and updating the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

### TRPC's Mission

Provide visionary, collaborative leadership on regional plans, policies, and issues for the benefit of all Thurston region residents.

To support this mission, we:

- Address growth management, environmental quality, economic opportunity, and other topics to sustain and enhance the region's quality of life.
  - Assemble and analyze data that support informed local and regional decision making
  - Act as a "convener" to build regional consensus on issues through information and inclusive public involvement.
  - Build intergovernmental consensus on regional plans, policies, and issues in support of local implementation.
- Conduct regional transportation planning consistent with state and federal requirements

## TRPC's Vision

The Thurston region will become a model for sustainability and livability. Our residents will enjoy accessible, efficient, and effective, multimodal transportation on a system that is integrated regionally, maintained for longevity, and minimizes its impacts on the region's environment. Our collective work will preserve environmental quality, consume less energy and water, sustainably use lands, produce less waste, and advance our climate targets. We will support our economic development partners to foster a vibrant economy. Our actions will enhance an excellent education system, cultivate a healthy environment, and foster a diverse, inclusive, and equitable community that remains affordable and livable. We will think in generations, not years. The region will work together toward common goals, making decisions with integrity, and holding ourselves accountable to all Thurston region residents.

## 2024–2028 Strategic Priorities

### Move People and Goods

- Preserve the region's existing transportation system, make strategic system investments, improve safety, and expand multimodal transportation options, including vehicle trip reduction.
- Scope and implement transportation work holistically — incorporating land use; climate change; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; and sustainability.

### Foster Sustainable Growth

- Preserve the Thurston region as a livable, healthy, and sustainable region.

### Collaborate Regionally

- Support member organizations and other partners' efforts to tackle cross-jurisdiction issues.

### Inform and Engage Community

- Actively use and promote TRPC's data, mapping, modeling, and planning to inform decision-makers and others about issues that relate to TRPC's Vision, Mission, and Values.
- Foster ongoing, meaningful relationships with members, partners, community groups, and community leaders to help ensure that TRPC's work adequately reflects the needs and input of all Thurston region residents.

### Enhance Agency Functions

- Create a work environment that attracts and retains a highly qualified staff that is adequately resourced to conduct innovative and high-quality planning, data, modeling, convening, and informing.

## Strategic Priorities for 2024–2028



### Purpose

The RTP serves as a strategic blueprint for the region’s transportation system to the year 2050. Regional planning “makes sense,” and policymakers would engage in the process even absent state and federal requirements. A continuous, collaborative, and coordinated planning approach addresses the needs of the entire region. Beyond a simple statement of purpose, the RTP serves many functions:

- Implements transportation elements of *Creating Places, Preserving Spaces – A Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region* (Sustainable Thurston Plan).
- Supports local, county, state, and tribal governments’ efforts to create and maintain livable communities throughout the region.
- Promotes movement of people, goods, and services in ways that minimize social, fiscal, and environmental impacts.
- Emphasizes taking care of the existing system through safety, maintenance, and preservation programs.
- Supports local, state, and federal efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.

- Seeks to enhance the resiliency of the region’s transportation network in response to the impacts of climate change and other natural hazards.
- Embodies the philosophy that land use and transportation are inextricably linked and must be managed cooperatively to meet both land use goals and transportation needs.
- Recognizes that the rural and resource lands, walkable neighborhoods, city/town centers, urban corridors, and active and diverse economies called for in local and tribal plans require a supportive transportation system.
- Seeks to improve the efficiency of the transportation system through a variety of means, such as using new road-building materials, trip reduction strategies, transportation technology, and alternative fuels.
- Honors the diversity of needs in the region and identifies strategies to improve mobility for people of all ages, races/ethnicities, abilities, English language proficiencies, and incomes.
- Meets fiscal constraints, with revenues identified in the RTP sufficient to fund the listed projects and maintain the existing system.
- Meets state and federal planning requirements and specific regulatory guidelines.
- Acknowledges that while the region has made progress since the last RTP, many challenges remain.

## Planning Timeline

TRPC is required to update the long-range transportation plan at least every five years (federal requirements) and review it biennially (state requirements). TRPC may make annual revisions to the plan to keep it current. These annual reviews typically include changes to the project list and limited changes to other parts of the plan. The RTP must look at least 20 years into the future. This includes projections for population, employment, transportation demand, and costs and revenues.

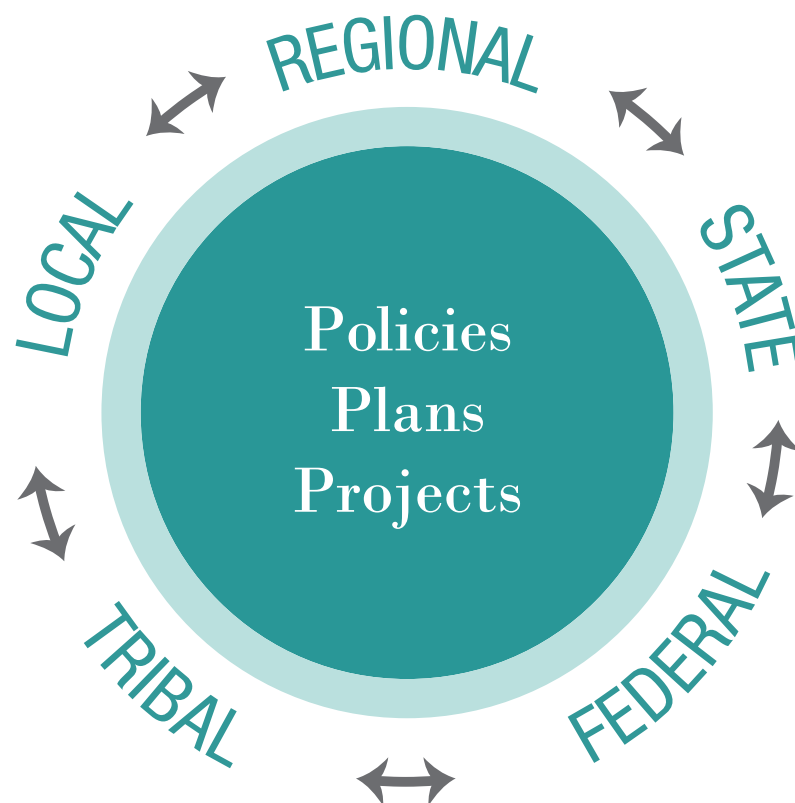
## Roles and Relationships

TRPC coordinates the RTP planning process with a variety of partners. At multiple stages in the process and at various levels of formality, the policies, plans, and projects of the many partners connect.

A high degree of communication and coordination is necessary to serve the region and each individual partner effectively. In some cases, the coordination is required; in all cases, it adds value. At the more formal level, state and federal laws mandate certain reporting relationships and consistencies. The RTP must be consistent with local comprehensive plans, which in turn must be consistent with the Washington State Transportation Plan, and all must fit within the federal and state policies and guidelines.

TRPC develops and maintains both the regional population and employment forecast, and the regional transportation model, which provide the basis for our region's shared planning assumptions. We work closely with local, state, tribal, and federal governments, special districts, the private sector, other interest groups, and the general public to coordinate and validate data and planning assumptions. These regional models are then used by local agencies in their land use and transportation planning; by the state as part of the statewide multimodal system analysis; and by many other users as a basis for capital, business, and transportation planning. TRPC updates its regional models with refinements from local and state analysis. In this way, all the regional partners maintain a well-integrated planning process.

**Figure 1-1: Policies, Plans, and Projects Are Influenced By Local, Regional, State, Federal, and Tribal Partners**



**Figure 1-2: Federal and State Requirements for the RTP**

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS	COMBINED REQUIREMENTS	STATE REQUIREMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address 20+ year planning horizon</li> <li>• Include short- and long-range strategies</li> <li>• Review and update every 4 or 5 years, depending on air quality conformity status</li> <li>• Include performance measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address all modes of travel</li> <li>• Preserve existing system</li> <li>• Make efficient use of system</li> <li>• Reflect long-range land use plans</li> <li>• Model future travel demand</li> <li>• Identify projects and strategies</li> <li>• Conform with air quality rules</li> <li>• Address environmental impacts</li> <li>• Be financially feasible</li> <li>• Promote public involvement</li> <li>• Use performance measures to evaluate system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and the Washington State Transportation Plan</li> <li>• Include goals, objectives, and land use assumptions</li> <li>• Establish level of service standards</li> <li>• Review at least every 2 years to ensure plan is up to date</li> </ul>

The RTP also recognizes that just as policies, plans, and projects do not stop at a specific geographical or political boundary within the county, neither do they stop at the county line.

Many Thurston County residents travel to Lewis, Grays Harbor, Mason, Pierce, Kitsap, and King counties for work and leisure, just as residents of the surrounding counties travel to and through Thurston County.

Regional policymakers understand that land use, transportation, environmental, and economic policies and conditions outside of the county may greatly affect this region. To that end, the RTP calls for appropriate levels of communication and coordination outside county borders.

## Requirements

State and federal guidelines stipulate the elements and processes for creating and maintaining the RTP. In many instances the requirements overlap, emphasizing the connection between state and federal regulation and goals (Figure 1-2).

### Federal:

Federal law requires the RTP to plan for 20 years into the future and project the region’s needs, conditions, and resources. Within that 20-year horizon, the RTP must contain short- and long-range strategies.

Federal emphasis is on a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. The process is to provide consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services addressing:

- Economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
- Equitable access to multimodal transportation options that consider and provide for the differing mobility needs of all residents.
- Increased safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increased security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increased accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
- Greenhouse gas emission reduction, environmental protection and enhancement, energy conservation, improved quality of life, and consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- Enhanced integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasized preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Improved transportation system resiliency and reliability, including reducing/mitigating stormwater impacts.
- Enhanced travel and tourism.

This is to be accomplished through performance-based planning, a strategic approach that uses data to support decisions to help achieve desired outcomes. With direction from Congress, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) published rules in 2017 that provide specific requirements for meeting performance planning standards. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), and Intercity Transit (IT) worked together in 2017 and 2018 to establish performance measures and targets. For more information on performance standards for the Thurston region, see Appendix G, System Performance Report.

## State:

The state calls for integration and compliance among local land use plans, countywide planning policies, and the State Transportation Plan. Like the Thurston region, the state also recognizes the relationships between land use and transportation and requires inclusion of land use assumptions.

Standards and measurements are a state focus. For state approval, the RTP must determine regional level of service (LOS) standards, and how system performance and the effectiveness of strategies will be measured over time. The state also asks that the plan be reviewed biennially to keep it current.

As state law envisions, the RTP guides development of the region's integrated, multimodal transportation system, including capital investments, service improvements, programs, and transportation demand management measures.

## Combined:

Overarching themes permeate both state and federal guidelines. At both levels, the RTP must:

- Actively engage the public in both planning and implementation.
- Comply with laws governing civil rights; respect the needs of people age 65 or older and persons with disabilities; and foster social equity.
- Promote efficiency, security, safety, and maintenance of the system.

- Focus on both people and freight, calling for integration of all modes.
- Reduce transportation contributions to greenhouse gas emissions, consider the environment and quality of life, comply with specific air quality rules, and address climate change and environmental impacts.
- Encourage the use of technology to support planning and operations.
- Carefully appraise the relationship between community desires and community resources, and realistically outline financial and policy solutions.
- Target investments to address performance.

## Regional Conditions

Unique geographical factors in Thurston County guide land use and transportation policies and strategies. The Puget Sound lowlands, prairies, Cascade foothills, and numerous lakes, rivers, and wetlands draw people to the area, but also direct where development and transportation facilities can locate.

Many residents engage in year-round biking or walking. Gray days and early winter nightfall require a transportation system with safe, well lit, well maintained, clearly marked sidewalks, roads, crosswalks, and trails. Because of decreasing revenues, local jurisdictions and the state face increasing challenges to preserve and maintain the system.

## COVID-19 Pandemic and the RTP

In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023), Gov. Jay 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.

Interstate 5 runs through the heart of the region, acting as an essential freight corridor and providing direct access to neighboring communities. However, the freeway also divides some of our region’s communities, impacting air and noise pollution for nearby residents and creating gaps for travelers.

Since the 1960s, Thurston County has been among the fastest growing counties in the state. Population increased over 40 percent between 2004 and 2024. Just under half of current residents (47.5 percent) lived in unincorporated Thurston County in 2024. The urban portions of Lacey, Tumwater, and Yelm outpaced their fellow jurisdictions in growth, with Yelm experiencing the highest rate of increase in the past two decades.

The state Office of Financial Management projects that the county’s 2024 population of 307,000 will grow to 407,400 by 2050. Because of the nation’s aging population and the community’s many amenities — a multimodal transportation system, and advanced health care and retirement facilities — people age 65 or older will comprise a larger percentage of the total population. Especially for people who are “aging in place” in the more remote areas of the county, transportation and other social systems will be under pressure to expand to match changing needs.

About 30,600, or one in five, workers commute outside the region to work — far more than the 20,800 that travel to Thurston County for employment.

The government sector continues to provide the largest share of jobs in the region — an estimated 25 percent in 2022. However, in recent years, large retail chains supplied jobs, goods, and services for local residents, and also attracted consumers from neighboring counties. Thurston County has also seen growth in distribution and warehousing, adding over 5.5 million square feet and 3,500 jobs in five years — plus associated trips.

The region's economy has largely recovered from the effects of the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 unemployment rate was at 4.1 percent — the lowest rate in more than 30 years — and employment in most sectors is at or above pre-pandemic levels. Average wages have increased 25 percent since 2019, slightly above inflation.

However, affordability remains an issue. Rents remain high and homeownership remains unaffordable to many, especially first-time homebuyers. Wage increases have not been experienced evenly by workers of all incomes or sectors, and for many have not kept pace with inflation. The poverty rate for people of color (11.8 percent) is still significantly higher than for people who are white (8.8 percent). Over 37,000 households are cost-burdened (spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing) and over 2,000 Thurston County residents experienced homelessness in 2023.

Even with these growing challenges, the region successfully maintains and operates a transportation system comprised of dozens of transit routes and services; over 2,500 miles of roadway; hundreds of miles of bike lanes, trails, and sidewalks; almost 90 miles of rail; a marine terminal; and a regional airport. Looking to future needs in 2050, the community must continue to seek new methods and creative funding to maintain this diverse system.

## The Challenge

As the region examines current realities and looks out to 2050, many questions arise:

- How do we sustainably build, maintain, and operate the transportation system?
- What additional steps will we need to take to reach our greenhouse gas reduction and vehicle miles traveled goals?
- Does new development match growth management goals?
- How does the transportation system adapt to provide equitable access to multimodal transportation options and address barriers based on age, race/ethnicity, language, ability, and income?
- Does the transportation system increase economic vitality, bringing new business to the community and efficiently moving goods?
- How well can the transportation system adapt to changing climate conditions and recover from natural hazards?
- What role do federal, state, and local regulations play in where and how growth occurs?
- Are community resources and payment responsibilities distributed equitably?
- What are the social, environmental, and infrastructure costs of current patterns and trends?

The Thurston region continues to monitor the land use and transportation vision against evolving reality.

Regional policymakers strive to create a transportation system that easily moves people and freight as efficiently as possible. Opinions vary widely on what that system should look like and how travel should occur. Some members of the community want more bike facilities, and some want less. Some value speed, others safety. Some prioritize the needs of freight, others the needs of people. Many residents use I-5 for local trips and others never use the freeway unless leaving the county. Many people face barriers to traveling — no matter the mode.

The challenge is in the balance. Balancing individual and community needs. Short- and long-term strategies. Costs weighed against benefits. Urban and rural considerations. Investing now and sustaining the future. All hard choices, with no simple solutions. Balance.

These challenges will require learning together as a region and resolving to make plans, invest in, and create a future that will be sustainable. As we learned during the Sustainable Thurston discussions, these will not be easy conversations, but they are necessary and we should begin as soon as possible.

In the face of all these challenges, we need to plan for the future:

- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Changing climate and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Changing population
- Equitable outcomes for all residents
- Transportation funding
- Legislative collaboration
- Public transportation
- Technology

## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Sidewalks, trails, and roads that support bicycling and walking help make all of our communities more sustainable and healthy.



**60** miles of paved trails

**300** miles of bike lanes, wide shoulders, and on-street bike routes

**950** miles of sidewalks and pedestrian connections

**Helping You Get Around on Foot or by Bicycle**

### Gaps in the System

- Zero trails connecting Bucoda, the Nisqually Reservation, and the Chehalis Reservation to the regional trail network.
- 218 miles of missing sidewalks along arterials and collectors in urban areas. Forty percent of such roads don't even have a sidewalk on one side of the road.



## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# CLIMATE CHANGE

Our changing climate affects the region's transportation system and our decisions on where to go and how to get there.



## By 2050 we're expecting:

**94°F** average high temperature in August

**22% drop** in summer rainfall

**5** more days of heavy rainfall in the winter

- ☒ larger more frequent wildfires
- ☒ longer & hotter summer droughts
- ☒ more frequent flooding (including in downtown Olympia)

## We Need to Prepare for:

- Road closures and detours due to summer wildfires
- Road closures and detours due to winter storm flooding and damage
- More expensive road repairs and construction projects



## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# POPULATION

Thurston County's changing population will impact where, and how, we move in the future.



**100,000**  
more people

9,500 school-aged children (age 5 to 19)  
36,000 senior citizens (65+) - 16,500 will be 85+

**55,000**  
more local jobs

**52,000**  
more housing units  
(apartments, single-family homes, etc.)

**BY 2050**  
we are expecting  
**MORE**

In 2024, Thurston County's population will be about 307,000. By 2050, this is expected to grow to 407,400.

### We Need to Prepare for:

- More people using public transportation
- More bike lanes, trail, and sidewalks that connect people to where they want to go
- More vehicles on the road
  - More tech-savvy travelers that use autonomous vehicles and micromobility devices such as hoverboards and electric bikes (e-bikes)
  - More innovative ways of moving freight and large trucks



## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# EQUITY

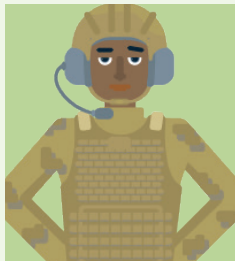
The burdens and benefits of transportation decisions and investments should be equally shared.



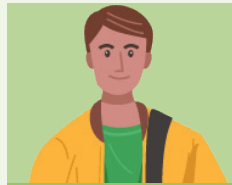
## MEET YOUR THURSTON COUNTY NEIGHBORS



**5,800**  
households have  
no access to a car



**6,100**  
are active-duty  
military personnel



**2,200**  
are unhoused  
or unsheltered,  
including 1,300  
students



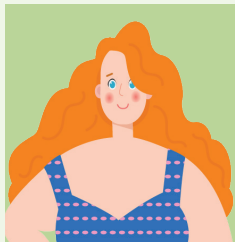
**29,300**  
are veterans



**43,800**  
live with a  
disability



**37,800**  
households are  
cost-burdened —  
the cost of housing  
and transportation  
exceeds 30% of  
their income AND  
they earn less  
than 80% of the  
county's median  
family income.



**28,300**  
live in poverty —  
for a one-person  
household, that's  
an income of just  
\$15,489 in 2023



**86,800**  
are people of color



**34,500**  
speak a language  
other than English  
at home;  
12,100 speak  
English less than  
"very well"



## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Between 2025 and 2050, Thurston County communities will collectively spend more than \$272 million each year preserving and improving our transportation system.



## What will we be spending our transportation dollars on?

**\$151M** on public transportation  
(Intercity Transit and ruralTRANSIT) – including transit facilities, buses, vans, and service



**\$116M** on local streets, roads, bridges, and shared use trails

**\$21M** on transportation projects that have regional impacts including freeway interchanges, new roads and connections, and new shared use trails

**\$14M** on administration costs and the interest on project loans and bonds

**\$51M** on maintaining and preserving existing streets and roads

**\$30M** on local projects including sidewalks, bike lanes, roundabouts, and turn lanes

## Where does funding for our local streets, roads, bridges, and shared use trails come from?

68% from local sources including property taxes, sales taxes, and transportation benefit districts

23% from state sources including grants and the state fuel tax

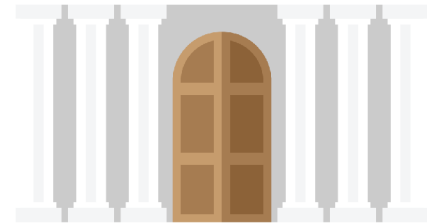
9% from federal sources including grants and FEMA funding

## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATION

Innovative, equitable, and efficient transportation solutions require working with the local, state, and federal governments.



## When we have:

- Unpredictable transportation funding
- Changing state and federal transportation priorities
- Potentially conflicting policies and incentives for new transportation technology
- Competing priorities for crumbling infrastructure
- Strong disagreement about transportation strategies and funding

### **We need to advocate for our transportation system:**

- Keep exploring ways to improve I-5 and other state facilities
- Maintain and expand public transportation — in our urban, rural, and tribal areas
- Preserve and maintain the transportation system — state highways, local roads, bridges, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Complete projects underway
- Work with our local jurisdictions to identify priority transportation projects and programs
- Speak with a common voice when we meet with our state delegation
- Demonstrate our good stewardship over the transportation dollars we receive

## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Improving access to public transportation means a more efficient, equitable, and longer lasting transportation system.



## INTERCITY TRANSIT

**966** bus stops

**281** shelters

**86** coaches

**19** routes

**3** Park & Ride lots

**3.8 million**  
trips taken in 2023



**3.76 million**  
trips by bus  
including express  
trips to Tacoma



**Zero-Fare**  
on Jan 1 2020, Intercity  
Transit began providing  
zer-fare services on all  
bus and Dial-a-Lift routes



**137,000**  
trips by Dial-a-Lift  
helping those that need it  
most get from door-to-door

## ruralTRANSIT

**26,000** trips taken in 2023  
*Approximately 46,000 trips were taken in 2019*



**SIX** coaches on **three** routes in **2024**

### FARE-FREE

on Feb 3 2020, ruralTRANSIT  
began providing fare-free  
services on all routes

stops at the Chehalis Reservation, Rochester, Grand Mound, Tenino, Bucoda, Rainier, Yelm, Centralia, and Tumwater

## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# TRANSPORTATION TECHNOLOGY

Emerging transportation technology is fundamentally changing how we get around - and how well we do it.

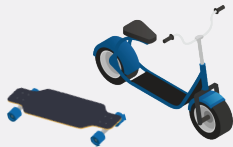


## Changing How We Get Around



### Drone deliveries

delivering goods to your home and office through the air and not on the road



### Micromobility devices & e-bikes

making it that much easier to commute by electric bicycle, scooter, skateboard, hover board and so much more



### Hybrid & electric vehicles

changing the type of fuel we use in our vehicles



### Autonomous vehicles (AV)

being a passenger in the driver's seat — even if you're a truck driver hauling freight



### Vehicle-to-Infrastructure communication

making our roads smarter so they can support new transportation technologies

## Potential Consequences of Change:

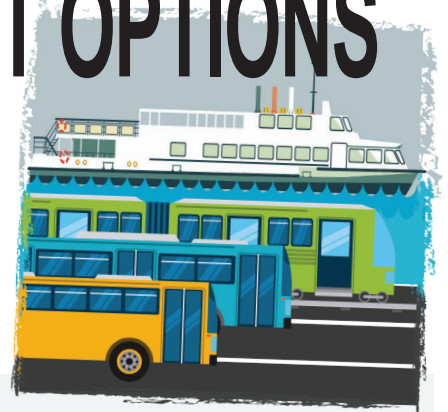
- **Speeding on sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails** — micromobility devices and e-bikes travel faster and farther than ever before
- **Increased transportation system capacity** — AVs improve the existing transportation infrastructure's capacity simply by driving better than people
- **Clutter in the sky** — fewer vehicles on the road, but more in the sky
- **Maintenance woes** — with more efficient vehicles on the road, tax dollars funded by the gas tax must stretch even farther
- **Car Sharing and Ride Sharing** — decreasing the number of people who own a private vehicle
- **Regulatory lag** — technology changes faster than federal, state, and local regulations

## Planning for...

WHAT MOVES YOU: THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

# HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT OPTIONS

With a growing population, high capacity transit options are becoming more accessible to — and convenient for — Thurston region residents and employees.



## THE NUMBERS

**\$0.<sup>00</sup>**  
 the cost of fare on Intercity Transit's system — including express routes to Pierce County



**15**  
 minutes

frequency of weekday transit service on Martin Way and Capitol Boulevard



**20,500**

the number of people who live or work within walking distance of a One stop — which serves the Martin Way corridor



**2045**

the year Sound Transit's DuPont Sounder extension will start service - planning begins in 2034



**69,000**

the number of passengers in 2024 using Centennial Station in Lacey. Approximately 68,000 were served at Centennial Station in 2019

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