



Washington State
Transportation Commission

2009 Annual Report

Moving Into the Future . . .



Issued
January
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An aerial, top-down view of the deck of a ferry. The deck is grey and has several white structures, including a large central cabin with a sign that says "SPOKANE". There are lifebuoys along the sides and various equipment on the deck. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, sans-serif font.

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Acknowledgments:

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Table of Contents

- Message from the Chairman 2
- Summary of Recommendations 3
- Part 1: Priorities for the Statewide Transportation System 5
 - Connecting and Building Communities 6
 - Transportation and the Economy 6
 - Operational Safety of Streets, Roads, and Highways 6
 - Transportation, Land Use and the Environment 6
 - Climate Change and Air Quality 7
 - Puget Sound and Water Quality 7
 - Connectivity 8
 - Revenue Shortfalls and Potential Solutions..... 9
 - Transportation System Preservation, Maintenance and Management..... 9
 - Alternative Sources of Revenue 9
 - Tolling and Pricing..... 10
 - Street Utility Fee..... 10
 - Long-Term Funding 11
 - Ferries 11
 - Transit..... 11
 - Rail 12
 - Streets, Roads and Highways..... 12
- Part 2: What We Have Heard 13
 - Preservation..... 13
 - Safety 14
 - Economic Vitality 14
 - Mobility 15
 - Environmental Quality and Health 16
 - Stewardship..... 16
 - Views Heard at Local Meetings..... 17
- Part 3: Overview of 2009 Work and Activities 19
 - Joint Work with California and Oregon 19
 - The 2011 – 2030 Washington Transportation Plan..... 19
 - Ferry Customer Survey Update 20
 - Tolling Policy, Toll Setting and Ferry Tariffs 20
 - Aviation Planning Council 20
 - Facility Naming 20
 - Road Jurisdiction Transfer..... 20
 - Local Meetings and Outreach 20
- Part 4: Priority Focus..... 21
- Commissioners 23
- Footnotes 25



Message from the Chairman

The Washington State Transportation Commission is pleased to present the 2009 Annual Report to the Governor and the State Legislature. This report identifies the economic and environmental challenges transportation faces. And, it highlights the progress our state has made building both projects and new partnerships.

Despite the economic challenges of 2009, orange construction barrels and cones dotted almost every county in the state representing jobs, renewal, and progress toward state policy goals in transportation. Transportation investment in roads, rail, bridges, sidewalks, transit, ferries, airports, and culverts provided jobs for thousands of workers and injected millions of dollars into the economy every day.

Challenges to the system remain on the front burner for the state, with the largest being a stable funding source to sustain investment.

Trend analysis shows declining gas tax revenues nationwide as automobiles become more fuel efficient, the price of gasoline continues to increase, and more people switch to alternative forms of transportation. Coupled with the emphasis on climate change, and reducing carbon emissions, and given a citizenry that balks at increasing taxes, Washington's biggest hurdles to fund the system are political. However, our economic reliance on our transportation system dictates we forge ahead.

How we journey into the future will be determined by our leadership, courage, and ability to innovate in a turbulent environment. Public outreach and communication may be the most important bridge that the Commission provides to ensure that Washington stays committed to its future.

Carol Moser, Chairman



Summary of Recommendations

Transportation budget and policy decisions should connect and support communities across the state. Because our current transportation model is not sustainable, budget realities should help us shift attention from capital projects to capital ideas that can improve the entire transportation system, recognizing that nearly every trip begins on a city street, a county road or a sidewalk.

This Annual Report contains policy recommendations and information to fulfill the statutory duties of the Transportation Commission, as provided in RCW 47.01.071 and RCW 47.01.075. It identifies the economic and environmental challenges transportation faces. And, it highlights the progress made building projects, improving programs and establishing new partnerships.

Connecting and Building Communities

Transportation and the Economy. Because transportation and the economy are directly tied to one another, “economic vitality” should be included in statute as a goal for planning and funding transportation investments statewide. The state should also adopt an overall policy that connects investments in transportation, land use and economic development.

Transportation Safety. Increase education and enforcement, and focus on effective, less costly operational fixes to enhance safety at known dangerous segments or locations:

- Increase use of electronic signage displaying the speed of passing cars to reduce speed.
- Increase safety warning signage when approaching dangerous curves, intersections, etc.
- On rural state highways with considerable residential importance, WSDOT should moderate its priority of increasing traffic throughput and give more focus to the safety of residents.
- Consider modifying standards to better address the uses and traffic of rural county roads.

Transportation and the Environment. Use incentives to develop and promote transportation options that meet mobility needs while avoiding harmful impacts to air quality and water quality. Approaches to consider include:

- Shift trips from cars to non-motorized travel, or to transit, where feasible;
- Accelerate development of cleaner motorized vehicles; and
- Reduce travel by supporting telework opportunities and home delivery. Plan for clustering of necessary consumer services.

To better fund stormwater cleanup and prevention from transportation projects, the Legislature should either support a barrel fee on oil or allow existing toxics funds to be used to prevent stormwater impacts.

Improve Connectivity. Continue to improve connections to facilitate travel using multiple modes and between communities. Because this often requires transportation providers to work together, improved connectivity may require a greater role for regional transportation planning organizations and the state. Increased incentives may be needed to improve air and rail options.

Revenue Shortfalls and Potential Solutions

Preserve, Maintain and Manage the Transportation System

Establish a steady and predictable flow of new transportation revenue that includes adequate funding for preservation and maintenance of highways and ferries, and that includes a share for cities and counties to preserve and maintain their street and road network. Continue to improve the capacity of the existing highway system.

Explore Alternative Sources of Transportation Revenue and Efficiencies

For sustainable, long-term transportation funding, state and local governments must consider alternatives beyond traditional approaches. While a system where people pay for the miles they drive (with the possibility of rates varying according to location, time of day and day of week) is analogous to our traditional “pay-as-you-go” gas tax and is now technically feasible, it is doubtful that one state can implement a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) system on its own.

Both traditional and innovative sources more likely to gain acceptance and support from the general public and lawmakers in the short-term include:

- Increased vehicle registration and licensing fees;
- Some form of a value-based vehicle tax that tracks with the actual value of the vehicle;
- An incremental increase or an inflation factor for the gas tax;
- A portion of sales and property tax generated from specific transportation improvements, such as interchanges and transit corridors; and
- Increased tolling applications in urban and suitable rural areas.

Transportation dollars can stretch farther with greater utilization of technology to maximize the existing system and by increased use of alliance contracting and innovative public-partnerships, where appropriate, and other innovative construction and finance techniques, such as longer bond terms and decreased bonding requirements.

Tolling and Pricing. The toll setting authority must set tolls sufficient to pay for debt service and a reserve account. Early tolling of projects should provide the state the ability to continue to obtain high bond ratings along with the lowest possible interest rates and thus lower finance costs.

Local funding needs. The Commission recommends that the Legislature authorize cities to enact a simple street maintenance utility for the pressing street and road preservation and maintenance problems they face. It should narrowly limit maintenance to operations usually done by city and county crews, such as seal coating, sweeping, electricity for street lights and signals, cleaning and maintenance of drains, snow removal, sign repair and replacement, and painting stripes. Base the charges on the feet of travel lane (or lanes) abutting the property, and cap the amount that can be charged per foot. Extend the same authority to GMA-planning counties for streets and roads within unincorporated urban growth areas.

Long-Term Funding Needs

Ferries. A statewide tax or fee that can fully fund long-term capital needs, including ferry system needs, is necessary to sustain long-term ferry service at a level comparable to today.

The Legislature should establish a farebox recovery target for the ferry system and ensure that the Commission be provided timely information on ferry operation, revenue, ridership, and costs. Close the remaining gap between ferry operating revenues and costs through a combination of existing dedicated transportation sources, increased fares and concessions – including fuel surcharges when warranted – and local funding mechanisms.

If additional funding sources are not employed for capital or operating costs, significant service reductions will be necessary in the near future.

Transit. The state should play an expanded role in transit, and in helping to coordinate and meet specific transit needs, such as intercity and inter-regional connections. Authorize transit agencies to recover a greater share of the cost of paratransit services.

Rail. The state should find opportunities to enhance passenger and commuter rail service and continue working with the privately-owned railroads to facilitate freight rail improvements.

Streets, Roads and Highways

1. Policies and funding for basic maintenance and preservation needs, sidewalk construction and completion of urban street grids are as necessary as efforts to eliminate bottlenecks and chokepoints on major highways and to improve public transportation options and service.
2. Extend to state highways the GMA requirement that transportation facilities be available concurrent with new development. In urban centers and/or transit oriented developments, concurrency requirements should address mobility by including walking, biking and transit access in addition to road standards.
3. Develop statutory guidance to improve project prioritization that considers:
 - community preferences and requirements;
 - need to balance project design, budget and benefit; and
 - the cost-benefit of proceeding with a short-term solution.



Part 1:

Priority Issues in Transportation Policy

Connecting and Building Communities

Transportation budget and policy decisions should meet the needs of the entire state and its transportation network. Because transportation and the economy are directly tied to one another, economic vitality should be included in statute as a priority goal for planning and funding transportation investments statewide.

Transportation and the Economy

Washington ports and industries consistently stress how transportation and the economy are directly tied to one another. Increasingly, they find themselves competing not only with companies and ports elsewhere in the United States, but with international freight management systems. Although there is no national vision or policy for freight the state has begun to develop data and policies to better move freight and goods.

Tourism also is a significant factor in the state economy.¹ It accounts for \$15.7 billion annually in direct spending and \$1 billion in state and local taxes, including \$171 million in state fuel taxes. Surprisingly, 60% of

travel-generated jobs are in the state's five most urbanized counties, but rural counties depend more on tourism for employment.

Over half the state's tourism business comes from Washington residents visiting other areas of the state. In marketing efforts to distinguish Washington from other wine regions, the Wine Commission emphasizes that here you can get in the field and meet the winemaker. Because 85% of WA wineries produce 5000 cases or less, they depend on sales out of the tasting room.

Recommendation:

Because transportation and the economy are directly tied to one another, "economic vitality" should be included in statute as a priority goal for planning and funding transportation investments statewide. The state should also adopt an overall policy that connects investments in transportation, land use and economic development.



Short lines play a vital role in our economy.

Operational Safety of Streets, Roads, and Highways

Washington State continues to improve safety on its roads and highways by using an integrated systems approach of enforcement and education to change driver behavior. In 2008, traffic deaths per thousand population and total number of deaths dropped again.



I-90 weaves through Snoqualmie Pass.

In one year, fatalities decreased to 522; there also were 2603 crashes resulting in serious injury.

One of the contrary safety trends in Washington and elsewhere is an increasing number of motorcyclist deaths. Motorcycle crashes have increased every year for the past nine years and represent 11% of highway fatalities even though motorcycles comprise only 3% of the registered vehicles. As with non-motorcycle fatalities, impairment and speeding are primary contributing factors.

Our state, with excellent leadership from the Traffic Safety Commission and the Washington State Patrol, is beginning to embrace ways to improve safety that are less expensive – and perhaps more effective – than construction. Outreach efforts on traffic safety education, and targeted efforts such as X52 (extra patrols 52 weeks of the year) have reduced speeding and DUI-related fatalities and serious injuries on Washington's roads.

Recommendation:

Increase education and enforcement, and focus on effective, less costly operational fixes to enhance safety at known dangerous segments or locations:

- *Increase use of electronic signage displaying the speed of passing cars to reduce speed.*
- *Increase safety warning signage when approaching dangerous curves, intersections, etc.*
- *On rural state highways with considerable residential importance, WSDOT should moderate its priority of increasing traffic throughput and give more focus to the safety of residents.*
- *Consider modifying standards to better address the uses and traffic of rural county roads.*



Stormwater collection and treatment needs attention.

Transportation, Land Use and the Environment

Each county, city, port and transit agency in the state has its own capital improvement program and project selection process. Those cities and counties required to plan under the Growth Management Act (GMA) – the vast majority of Washington cities and counties – must adopt 20-year plans with transportation and land use elements that support each other. Transit agencies also must develop capital plans; some mesh better with county and city transportation plans than others.

There is no statewide land use plan, nor is there a statewide economic development strategy. But there is a statewide transportation plan – the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP), which is required to be consistent with GMA goals.² The WTP offers an opportunity to connect and strengthen land use and transportation from the bottom to the top and to connect land use, transportation, environmental protection and economic development.

The key environmental challenges related to transportation are climate change and water quality; addressing both will release fewer contaminants into the environment. Prudent planning would apply a cost-benefit analysis to best determine when to avoid impacts, when to reduce, and when to mitigate.

A greater reliance on transit, where feasible, will help to avoid and reduce impacts on both air and water quality. Transit ridership is very high in some urban areas; transit trips account for about 40% of travel to and from Seattle's Central Business District and also is very high in downtown Bellevue. Despite this market penetration, increased market share for transit is expected. Because downtown property owners don't want to build more parking, Seattle intends to increase the percentage of commuters and shoppers who travel downtown without driving alone by 6% by 2015. Transit will likely add to its market share in Bellevue and Redmond when light rail reaches there.

Aside from air quality and water quality concerns, there is neither enough land nor money to meet travel demand with new highway lanes. WSDOT Secretary Paula Hammond has pointed out that the more transit service there is in an urban

corridor, the better. In the Puget Sound area, transit service has to grow much more than the highway system to accommodate regional growth.³

Climate Change and Air Quality

Reducing greenhouse gases generated by transportation will require a full suite of strategies including reduced vehicle miles traveled, improved vehicle technology and a lower carbon content in vehicle fuel, while continuing to provide the traveling public a variety of transportation options. Meeting all these goals will require strategic thinking, new perspectives, and new partnerships.

Some partnerships can benefit the environment and the economy simultaneously through efficiency improvements. As an example, trains are more fuel efficient than trucks for moving many products long distances. One double stacked train would take approximately 280 trucks off the highway, therefore there is up to three times less nitrous oxide (NOx) emissions when shipping by rail.⁴

More dense, transit-oriented development also has multiple benefits. Communities that allow people to walk from place to place not only reduce how much driving is done, but can be safer and healthier, and ultimately require less public infrastructure from roads to fire stations. For a variety of reasons, however, from tax structure, to transit funding⁵, to the sunk costs of automobile ownership, smart growth is difficult to implement in reality.⁶

Puget Sound and Water Quality

Untreated storm water and other runoff from paved surfaces is a primary source of pollution for Puget Sound and streams and rivers throughout the state. New federal and state stormwater permits require testing and monitoring of runoff from highways, rest areas, maintenance facilities and ferry terminals.

A variety of strategies exist to reduce transportation impacts on water quality, from reducing stormwater flows with smaller development footprints and creating fewer impervious surfaces to eliminating or capturing sediment and harmful pollutants such as copper, oil and other hydrocarbons.

Because WSDOT, counties, cities and ports spend a lot of money to mitigate stormwater runoff and other environmental impacts from transportation projects, state and local transportation agencies should work with the Puget Sound Partnership and similar agencies around the state in mutually beneficial ways. Collaboration on wetlands purchase and set-aside, watershed protection activities and development of mitigation banks, along with a joint approach to avoid and reduce harmful runoff, also can help improve Puget Sound and other watersheds, streams and rivers.

Recommendation:

Use incentives to develop and promote transportation options that meet mobility needs while avoiding harmful impacts to air quality and water quality. Approaches to consider include:

- *Shift trips from cars to non-motorized travel, or to transit, where feasible;*
- *Accelerate development of cleaner motorized vehicles;*
- *Reduce travel by supporting telework opportunities and home delivery. Plan for clustering of necessary consumer services.*

To better fund stormwater cleanup and prevention from transportation projects, the Legislature should either support a barrel fee on oil or allow existing toxics funds to be used to prevent stormwater impacts.

Puget Sound is a marine highway.



Connectivity

People and goods need to move in timely and reliable ways. People often think of connectivity as the ability to get from one place to another with or without a car. It also can be reconnecting parts of a community by eliminating a grade crossing that prevents emergency vehicles, buses, cars and bicycles from getting across town. Solving grade crossing congestion and many other connectivity problems frequently requires a partnership between two or more transportation providers, such as when a trip requires changing travel modes. Connectivity provides ferry users a way to move around at their destination without having to drive a car onto the ferry. Kitsap Transit designs its service around the ferry schedules and Island Transit connects Clinton to other parts of Island County.

In rural Washington, many communities lack non-automobile connections to each other. Connectivity in these places means overcoming the challenge of simply getting from place to place. WSDOT, local transit systems and private bus services carriers have begun to restore limited intercity bus service to some rural centers. Also, daily passenger train service returned to Leavenworth for the first time in over 30 years, when Amtrak added the stop in September. Another passenger train service improvement, though perhaps only temporary, is a second daily Seattle-Vancouver, B.C. train to improve travel during the 2010 Olympics.

Probably the most significant connectivity improvement during 2009 was Sound Transit light rail service connecting downtown Seattle with Sea-Tac Airport to provide reliable, predictable and inexpensive travel between two activity centers. Many other activity centers and communities continue to lack predictable, reliable and timely alternatives to car travel, including travelers between Olympia and Seattle in Western Washington and commuters between Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho across the state line. Multiple transit providers, and perhaps other governmental partners, will need to come together to provide these travel alternatives.

Connectivity also involves travel options, such as air and rail. Despite upheaval in commercial air service nationally, most communities in our state held their own in 2009. Moses Lake saw limited service restored and Spokane added domestic service to western hubs other than Seattle.

However, commercial air service to rural communities will be an on-going challenge as larger planes (Horizon has replaced 37-seat Dash-8's with 76-seat Q400's), combined with continued downward pressure on West Coast fares (by Southwest and Virgin America) reduce the ability of Alaska Airlines to cross-subsidize Horizon Air services.

Beginning in January 2010, Horizon Air is dropping one of three daily flights from Walla

Walla to Seattle due to a lack of travelers. Even before switching to larger planes last year, low demand required the midday Walla Walla flight to stop in Pasco.

Recommendation:

Continue to improve connections to facilitate travel using multiple modes and between communities. Because this often requires transportation providers to work together, improved connectivity may require a greater role for regional transportation planning organizations and the state. Increased incentives may be needed to maintain and improve air and rail options.



Passenger train travel is increasing again.



A 36-minute Sound Transit ride connects downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac Airport.

Revenue Shortfalls and Potential Solutions

Whatever direction the economy takes and how- ever quickly individuals and policymakers address climate change, the Transportation Commission embraces a fundamental principle from the last Washington Transportation Plan that grows in im- portance as funding and mode choice become more uncertain. That principle calls for the maintenance, preserva- tion, and extension of the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services.

Transportation System Preservation, Maintenance and Management

In November 2007, the 2009-2011 transporta- tion revenue forecast projected that motor vehicle fuel tax (MVFT) receipts would total \$2.785 billion for that biennium. By November 2009, the MVFT projection had dropped to \$2.587 billion. Not only has fuel economy been improving but, per capita vehicle miles traveled has been declining in most of the state.

Preservation and maintenance are the first priority and also safest investment tactics in an environment of uncertain revenue and changing expectations. These priorities emphasize meeting current needs and offer time to examine and consider the many suggestions for how to best adapt and move forward made in the current Joint Transportation Committee study of alternative transporta- tion funding methods.

All levels of government need to invest more in preserving and maintaining the existing highway and road system. The state's last two gas tax increases gained support by listing specific projects the new revenue would build but provided little additional revenue for upkeep of the existing state highway and ferry system. Because bonds were issued against the entire new revenue stream, most gas tax dollars are now pay- ing for debt and the limited budget for maintenance and preservation must be spread even further to preserve and maintain the system additions being built.



Maintenance and preservation need more funding.

Using technology and information can improve capacity and stretch transportation resources without adding signifi- cantly to capital investment. One of the latest examples on the state system is the set of the new structures appearing on Interstate 5 in Seattle. These will support overhead sign bridges displaying real-time traffic information and variable speed limits over each lane every half mile from just south of Boeing Field to I-90. By summer 2010, new electronic signs will operate on northbound I-5 and SR 520. By spring 2011, this same active traffic management (ATM) system will oper- ate on both directions of I-90 between Seattle and Bellevue.

Recommendation:

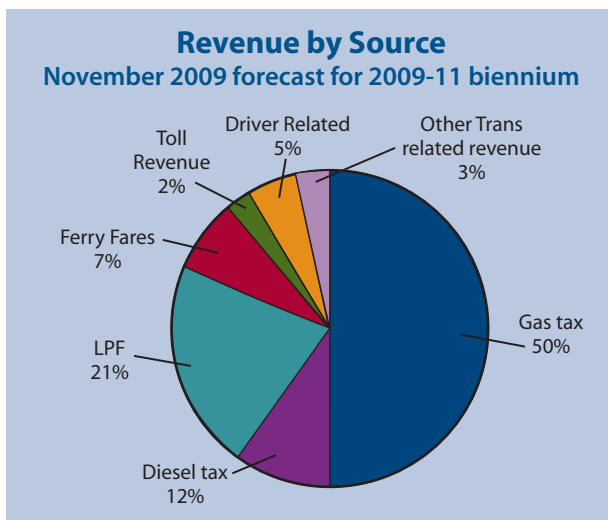
Establish a steady and predictable flow of new transportation revenue that includes adequate funding for preserva- tion and maintenance of highways and ferries, and includes a share for cities and counties to preserve and maintain their street and road network. Continue to improve the capacity of the existing highway system.

Alternative Sources of Revenue

The motor vehicle fuel tax (MVFT) provides 62% of the revenue to the state transportation budget. Fuel tax receipts also have been the primary source of federal transportation revenue, and a significant share of county and city transportation revenue. Counties rely heavily on the property tax, which funds the county road fund. Transit agencies and most cities depend on sales tax revenue for transportation infrastructure and operations.

Fuel tax receipts are declining due both to fuel efficiency efforts and a slow economy. Economic troubles also have reduced sales tax revenue critical to transit operations and have reduced government funds, generally.

Technology is moving at a rapid pace⁷ and can support complex tolling and pricing systems as well as a revenue system based on vehicle miles traveled (VMT), in which driv- ers pay for the miles they drive with per-mile rates varying according to location, time of day, and day of week. While techno- logically feasible, VMT pricing faces political and geographic barriers to implementation. One possible approach that would allow time for development while keeping the idea moving forward would be to implement a federally funded pilot VMT-based project on the West Coast -- perhaps an I-5 "Corridor of the Future" project. This idea is ad- vocated by the California, Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions.



Recommendation:

For sustainable, long-term transportation funding, the state and its local governments must consider alternatives beyond traditional approaches. While a system where people pay for the miles they drive (with rates varying according to location, time of day and day of week) is analogous to our traditional "pay-as-you-go" gas tax and is now technically feasible, it is doubtful that one state can implement a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) system on its own.

Both traditional and innovative sources more likely to gain acceptance and support from the general public and lawmakers in the short-term include:

- Increased vehicle registration and licensing fees;
- Some form of a value-based vehicle tax that tracks with the actual value of the vehicle;
- An incremental increase or an inflation factor for the gas tax;
- A portion of sales and property tax generated from specific transportation improvements, such as interchanges and transit corridors; and
- Increased tolling applications in urban and suitable rural areas.

Transportation dollars can stretch farther with greater utilization of technology to maximize the existing system and by increased use of alliance contracting and innovative public-partnerships, where appropriate, and other innovative construction and finance techniques, such as longer bond terms and decreased bonding requirements.

• Tolling and Pricing

Washington continues to learn how tolling and pricing can supplement and replace declining traditional sources of transportation revenue or manage demand. Though not designed to raise money, in 2009, the High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lane pilot on SR 167 in the Kent Valley marked one year of operation. Over 30,000 users paid an average of one dollar to save 8 minutes in the NB HOT lane and 4 minutes in the SB lane during peak hour travel.

Following the Commission's advice that tolling and congestion pricing should be applied over time to viable candidate transportation facilities, both the Legislature and regional transportation planning agencies have identified additional transportation facilities for study and future consideration.

The 2009 Legislature decided that tolling would contribute to paying the construction costs of SR 520 and the tunnel replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct portion of SR 99 through downtown Seattle. Variable rate tolling on SR 520 could begin as early as November 2010 or as late as June 2011. This will be the first state facility blending toll payments for construction and for traffic management.



SR 167 High Occupancy Toll Lane pilot.

Other toll studies underway include:

- Constructing express toll lanes on the I-405 Eastside Corridor;
- Building the I-5 Columbia River Crossing in Vancouver for vehicles and light rail. Both Washington and Oregon Transportation Commissions will need to come together to set tolling policy for this bi-state facility;
- Extending SR 167 from the Kent Valley to the Port of Tacoma;
- Extending SR 509 from SeaTac to I-5.

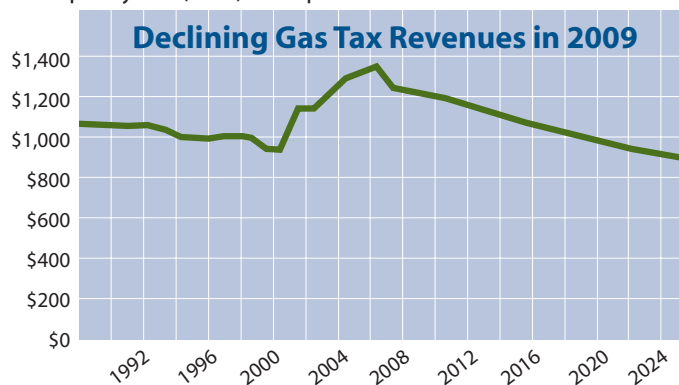
Pricing is not only a means of generating revenue; it is a way to manage congestion when demand outpaces capacity. This approach, long used in pricing airline seats, can be applied to roads and ferries. The Puget Sound Regional Council, in developing its long-range transportation plan, T-2040, has looked at a combination of tolling and pricing for highways and major arterials as a future revenue source.

In discussions with the State Treasurer and with an Expert Review Panel convened by the Joint Transportation Committee, the Commis-

sion has learned of a variety of financial, business plan and capital investment strategies that should allow the state to facilitate building and operating a growing number of toll facilities and, at the same time, improve the tolling experience for drivers.

Recommendation:

The toll setting authority must set tolls sufficient to pay for debt service and a reserve account. Early tolling of projects should provide the state the ability to continue to obtain high bond ratings along with the lowest possible interest rates and thus lower finance costs.



• Street Utility Fee

Consistently at meetings in different cities and counties across the state, the Commission hears that nearly all cities and many counties face difficulty maintaining the existing street and road system. With growing frequency, the county road fund does not provide adequate revenue to maintain existing roads. Cities lack any dedicated

transportation funding source; some have attempted to establish street utility fees for on-going repair of streets.

Neither state nor federal grants to counties and cities fill the gap. Even worse, fund balances from the Public Works Trust Fund and Community Economic Revitalization Board were depleted as one way to address the 2009 state budget shortfall. Not only are these long-standing state grant and loan programs unavailable, due in part to the state fuel tax revenue decline, the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) has no funding available either.⁸

City attempts to establish street utilities have been invalidated by the courts.⁹ Local governments may impose fees under their general police power authority.

Attempts to legislatively establish city street utility authority have been opposed due to concern about extra tax and/or fee burdens and skepticism that cities actually will invest additional revenue in the street system, and not use the authority to shift street improvement costs away from city general funds. The Commission is persuaded that a genuine need exists for additional revenue to preserve and maintain the local road system.¹⁰

Recommendation:

The Commission recommends that the Legislature authorize cities to enact a simple street maintenance utility for the pressing street and road preservation and maintenance problems they face. It should narrowly limit maintenance to operations usually done by city and county crews, such as seal coating, sweeping, electricity for street lights and signals, cleaning and maintenance of drains, snow removal, sign repair and replacement, and painting stripes. Base the charges on the feet of travel lane (or lanes) abutting the property, and cap the amount that can be charged per foot. Extend the same authority to GMA-planning counties for streets and roads within unincorporated urban growth areas.

Long-Term Funding

• Ferries

Washington State Ferries (WSF), as currently funded and operated, is not financially sustainable, neither today nor for the long-run. The biggest challenge is the large amount of capital funding needed to perform necessary preventive maintenance and replace aging vessels. Maintaining the existing level of WSF service over the next 22 years (the time frame of the recently-completed WSF Long Range Plan) will require at least \$3.5 billion more than is available from currently-identified sources to replace aging ferries and maintain existing boats and terminals in good operating condition. This funding gap is equivalent to half a million dollars a day for the next 22 years. In addition, the gap between fares and operating costs has required a growing subsidy from the transportation budget.



The newest ferry will launch this summer.

Since the loss of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) as the major source of ferry capital funding in 2000, transfers of discretionary transportation funds and significant fare increases have closed the operating gap to meet essential short term capital needs. Despite cumulative fare increases between 60% and 108%, ferry operations and ferry capital needs have required over \$650 million that could have been spent on other transportation needs in the state.

Recommendation:

A statewide tax or fee that can fully fund long-term capital needs, including ferry system needs, is necessary to sustain long-term ferry service at a level comparable to today.

The Legislature should establish a farebox recovery target for the ferry system and ensure that the Commission be provided timely information on ferry operation, revenue, ridership, and costs. Close the remaining gap between ferry operating revenues and costs through a combination of existing dedicated transportation sources, increased fares and concessions – including fuel surcharges when warranted – and local funding mechanisms.

If additional funding sources are not employed for capital or operating costs, significant service reductions will be necessary in the near future.

• Transit

Most transit funding in Washington comes from locally imposed sales taxes, followed by farebox receipts. State funding provides an average of only one percent of transit agencies' budgets. For transit agencies statewide, except

for King County Metro, sales tax revenue was down 3% from 2007 to 2008. An additional 12% to 13% decline hit all transit agencies, including Metro, in 2009. Sales tax accounts for 71% of Metro's operating budget.

When Metro increased its fare in February 2008, its ridership continued to grow. Traditionally a 10% fare increase reduced ridership by one percent; in the last two years the standard elasticity model for transit no longer operates. Metro attributes this not only to high gas prices but to the development and integration of systems in the Puget Sound region.

Although transit ridership statewide dropped slightly from 2008 levels, it was not enough to ease the pain of service reductions. At Intercity Transit, Thurston County's transit system, ridership is up 50% over the past three years; there are no easy places to cut.

Transit also is burdened with the high cost of providing paratransit services. Although federal law allows fares for paratransit service to be up to twice the fare for a similar trip on a fixed route, the state prohibits paratransit fares in excess of fares for the regular service.

Transit systems across the state are addressing their revenue needs in various ways:

- 16 of 25 systems increased fares in 2008 or 2009 and four plan fare increases in 2010. Most fare increases were in the 20% to 33% range;
- Spending down reserves;
- Deferring capital projects and purchase of new buses;
- Service cuts. Kitsap Transit is in its second round of service cuts and eight systems plan service reductions in 2010. After 2011, almost all systems will reduce service without new revenue.

Recommendation:

The state should play an expanded role in transit, and in helping to coordinate and meet specific transit needs, such as inter-city and inter-regional connections. Authorize transit agencies to recover a greater share of the cost of paratransit services.

• **Rail**

Although the rail network is almost exclusively owned and operated by privately held corporations, both our state and Sound Transit have made substantial investments to improve and streamline the existing mainline rail system for the benefit of passenger and commuter rail service. Although freight rail traffic declined nationally 18 to 19% in 2009, railroads have been able to reduce costs to prevent losses. Railroads continue investing in their infrastructure -- a national total of \$8.8 billion for 2009, making it the third highest investment year in history. These improvements benefit the flow and velocity of freight rail, which is critical to our state's economy.

The Legislature reduced state investment in passenger rail this biennium, in anticipation of an influx of new federal investment in rail. The state has requested over \$1.3 billion in the second phase of federal funding for high speed passenger rail.

Recommendation:

The state should find opportunities to enhance passenger and commuter rail service and continue working with the privately-owned railroads to facilitate freight rail improvements.

• **Streets, Roads and Highways**

Whatever path is taken in our transportation future and regardless of the pace of change, most trips for the foreseeable future -- whether people or goods are moving -- will take place on streets, roads, or highways, and sometimes on sidewalks. These basic pieces of infrastructure require ongoing preservation and maintenance. Many cities also have incomplete sidewalk systems and lack adequate connecting arterials; this can add to the street traffic burden such as when parents consider it safer to drive their children to and from school rather than walk or bicycle in neighborhoods without sidewalks or bicycle paths.

Bicycles, buses and cars all share streets and roads that are often in disrepair for lack of attention and funding. All of the revenue from the state's last two gas tax increases was dedicated to specific projects on the state highway system. None of the new revenue was allocated to cities and counties for the streets and roads that connect homes and businesses to the state system.

In Yakima County, for example, county road revenue is increasing in dollars, but decreasing substantially in value using the WSDOT Construction Cost Index (CCI). From 1990 to 2008, road revenue has increased an average 4.7% per year. CCI is 6.6% a year.

Recommendation:

1. *Recognize that nearly every trip from home begins on a city street, a county road or a sidewalk. Policies and funding for basic maintenance and preservation needs, sidewalk construction and completion of urban street grids are as necessary as efforts to eliminate bottlenecks and chokepoints on major highways and to improve public transportation options and service.*
2. *Extend to state highways the GMA requirement that transportation facilities be available concurrent with new development. In urban centers and/or transit oriented developments, concurrency requirements should address mobility by including walking, biking and transit access in addition to road standards.*
3. *Develop statutory guidance to improve project prioritization that considers:*
 - *community preferences and requirements;*
 - *need to balance project design, budget and benefit; and*
 - *the cost-benefit of proceeding with a short-term solution.*



Before and After:
The Coal Creek
Parkway in
Newcastle



Hundreds of bicycle commuters use the ferries daily.

Part 2:

What we have heard

A key function of the Transportation Commission is public outreach. Commissioners share information about transportation policy and funding and listen to viewpoints of citizens from around the state as eyes and ears for transportation policymakers in Olympia. This section highlights by topic what we have heard about transportation during 2009, in meetings with ferry communities, and conversations with statewide groups, and at conferences. These meetings highlight the diversity of the state and the importance of tying the state together through transportation.

• Preservation

➤ Many parts of the statewide transportation system are at risk, from the concrete and asphalt infrastructure of our highways, streets and roads and the ferries that ply the marine highway, to public bus and air transportation. The causes vary: society has not invested enough to maintain existing roads, bridges and state ferries; declines in sales tax revenue loss and fluctuating fuel prices have hit public transit hard; and declining ridership and decreased services in air transport have resulted in real or threatened loss of service in smaller markets.



County and city road systems lack adequate funding.

➤ Agricultural shippers need a reliable, cost-effective, integrated transportation system including trucks, rail and barges to get perishable commodities from the farm to processors and to markets, whether locally, within the US or overseas. A USDA-USDOT study¹¹ of agricultural transportation conducted by faculty in Washington State University's Transportation Research Group focused on rates, service and performance. Although the Final Report is under review, some preliminary findings and recommendations are:

- rail rates have decreased since the 1980s, except for the last 4 years;
- during years when railroads didn't earn a lot, producers expected that rates would soften;
- captive shippers are paying system investment costs and paying more;
- allowed rail fuel surcharges increased faster than fuel costs;
- trucking has been hit hardest in this recession;
- the loss of trucking firms could be a problem when demand picks up; and
- barge traffic is vulnerable to the aging infrastructure of dams and locks; dredging is increasingly expensive and subject to environmental challenge.

• Safety

➤ Reducing grade crossings between freight trains and automobiles has multiple benefits, not the least of which is greater safety for the driving public and improved access and mobility for fire trucks, ambulances and other emergency vehicles. As trains have increased in length and frequency, conflicts with street traffic becomes more challenging. In Kent, Spokane Valley, and Yakima, major grade crossing projects are underway but more are needed. "Bridging the Valley" is a series of projects that will separate vehicle traffic from train traffic in a 42 mile corridor between Spokane and Athol, Idaho which currently includes 75 railroad and roadway crossings. The projects will promote future economic growth, traffic mobility, traffic safety, and train whistle noise abatement through:

- Construction of approximately 19 separated grade crossings within the BNSF corridor. This will modify eight existing crossings and create approximately 11 additional grade separated crossings;
- Improvements to the existing Centralized Train Control signaling system; and
- Construction of a new Union Pacific RR Yard and elimination of mainline at-grade crossings on the UPRR line.

➤ Sometimes there can be trade-offs between mobility and safety; lower speed limits on a state highway through a rural community reduces the risk of collisions, but increases travel time. New technology under development can improve road safety by helping vehicles talk to each other and to devices on the roadway to avoid collisions. Vehicle Infrastructure Integration (VII) uses a 5.9 GHz Dedicated Short Range Communication (DSRC) system technology that is standardized and is publicly managed so that all vendors can utilize it.

Data can be used today for various data applications, such as a traffic management center. As roadside and in-vehicle infrastructure is deployed, full functionality of safety, navigation and other location based services can facilitate data transmission to several devices, such as cell phones or PDA's for traffic management and accident avoidance. Commercially, this technology will allow payment not only for tolling, but for related travel costs such as parking and mobility.



Another safety improvement.

• Economic Vitality

➤ The Transportation Commission is concerned that dropping "economic vitality" as a specific transportation priority in 2007 signals fewer transportation resources for those sectors that rely on transportation for new or ongoing economic development.

For example, tree fruit generates \$2.5 billion in sales each year.



Ferries are essential to Washington's tourism economy.

About 98% of the fruit moves out of state, with about 500,000 truckloads in central Washington annually. Over 90% of cherries are exported out of state by plane. They must be off the tree and overseas in 48 hours. Pass closures can mean that apples will literally "miss the boat."

Because a strong economy provides the foundation for the state's success, the Commission is using its process to develop the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) as a framework for connecting investments in transportation, land use and economic development. Viewing transportation needs and systems without an economic framework may not adequately identify and prioritize unique

transportation needs of the tourism¹², agriculture, and manufacturing sectors.

An economic perspective shows the importance of a commercial air service to rural communities that rely on tourism, retirement or recreational home use, or entrepreneurial business ventures. Air connections have played a major role in the recent economic growth of areas as diverse as the San Juan Islands and the Wenatchee Valley.

➤ Freight delays due to weather conditions continue to plague Washington businesses and farms. Avalanche closures and heavy snow conditions on Snoqualmie Pass

closed I-90 for 61 hours in 2008 and for 139 total hours from December 18, 2008 – April 6, 2009. WSDOT Freight Systems Division estimated the economic impact from flooding on Interstate 5 was \$12 million per day and \$6 million per day from snow closures on Interstate 90.¹³

In addition to the delays to cross-state travel, the 10,000 miles of freight and goods roads on the statewide county road network includes some roads and bridges that cannot handle heavy loads, due to seasonal weather conditions. In general, these deficiencies increase as one travels farther east in the state. Those counties known for wheat and other dry-land crops have a higher percentage of land in agricultural production, and their looser soil poses a greater freeze-thaw problem.¹⁴

Last year, the RTPO serving Benton, Franklin, and Walla Walla counties convened an All-Weather Road (AWR) Conference that established four delineation criteria to prioritize AWR projects:

- connectivity to the highway system;
- conditions & gaps in the system;
- safety; and
- season of haul of commodity.

➤ United States ports on the West Coast and the two railroads that serve them have joined forces to market the efficiencies, distribution networks and skilled labor of the West Coast ports in the face of rising competition from ports on the East Coast, Mexico and British Columbia.

Although West Coast ports currently handle nearly 70% of the traffic coming from Asia, the nation's largest trading partner, traffic has been down 15 to 20% on average. In 2014, the Panama Canal will complete a \$5.25 billion expansion that will allow for larger Asian ships to sidestep West Coast ports and head directly to East Coast markets. The Port of Prince Rupert and Canadian National Railway have committed \$1 billion to gain market share from the coast to inland markets.

West Coast ports market both their time advantage and environmental edge due to their proximity to Asia. The Ports of Seattle and Tacoma have long done so but as GHG emissions concerns grow, the Green Northwest Gateway can become ever more important. Our ports' location means ships consume less fuel and generate fewer emissions than those carrying cargo through the Panama and Suez canals.

In the ports, financial incentives are being used to persuade cargo vessels to use 0.5% sulfur diesel while docked. And, working with the Port of Tacoma and the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, the Port of Seattle is replacing or retrofitting about 10% of its trucks, cranes and forklifts. Under the same program, the Port of Tacoma is retrofitting or replacing about 14% of its fleet.

• Mobility

➤ With magnificent vistas and challenging topography, transportation challenges in our state have been met with unique floating bridges and a marine highway system. In addition to the 24 Washington State Ferries, four counties, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and some private businesses in the state operate ferries.¹⁵

The Puget Island ferry, operated by Wahkiakum County, connects Puget Island to Oregon and receives a state subsidy in light of its role in linking two states. Ferries operated by Pierce, Skagit and Whatcom Counties connect the mainland to islands not served by the state ferry system.

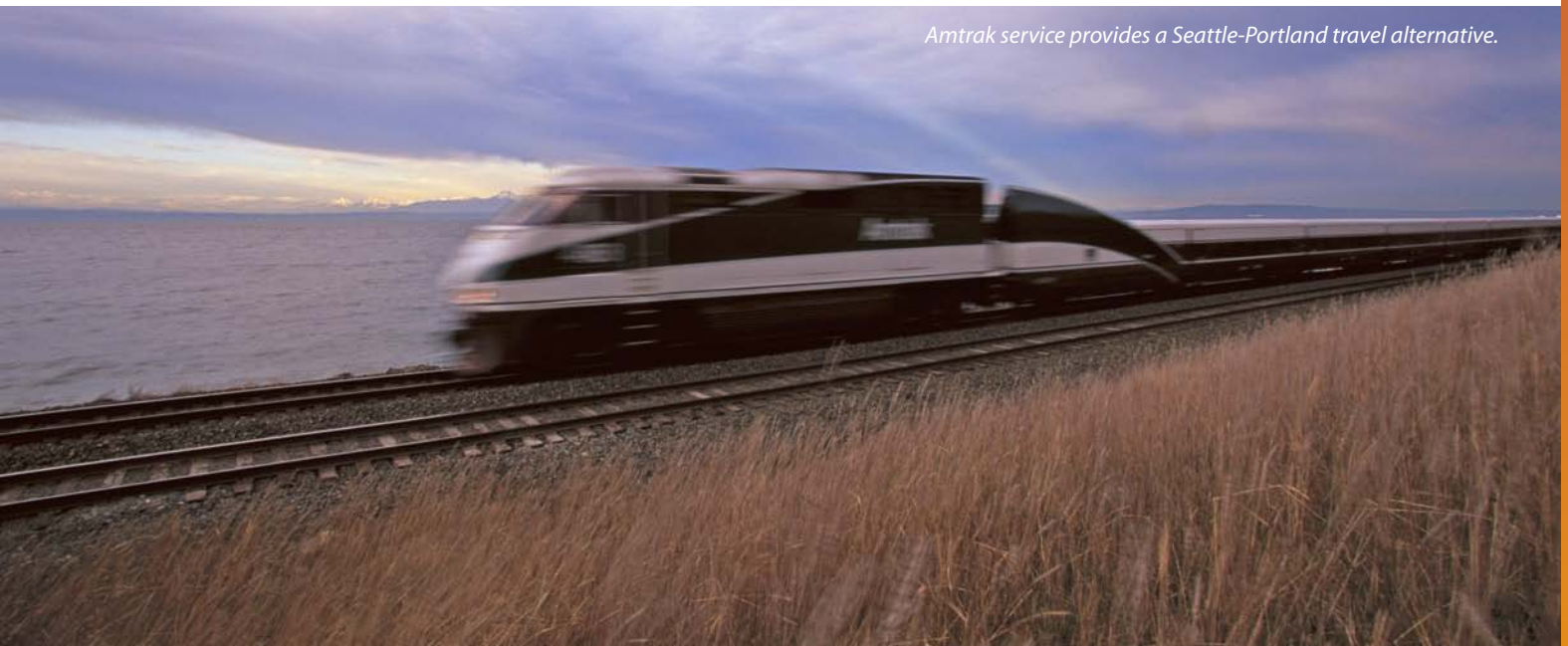
A report by the County Road Administration Board indicates that these county-operated ferries face the same mechanical and financial challenges as the state ferry system, including operating costs that are high compared to road maintenance costs and that exceed the revenue generated by fares. The report also compared 2008 user fees on state ferries and the four county ferries, revealing that the county ferries may be slightly less expensive to ride.

Counties may establish ferry districts with taxing authority, but none has yet taken that step.

➤ Major demographic change affecting the state will see the 65 and older population double in size over the next twenty years. For older adults, mobility is key to their quality of life.

Providing elder-friendly transportation involves interdisciplinary planning for roads and transportation and needs to involve the entire community, especially transit providers, social services agencies and health care providers. Gerontologists can help transportation planners and engineers improve vehicle and roadway safety and facilitate easier use of public transportation for older adults.

Amtrak service provides a Seattle-Portland travel alternative.



• Environmental Quality and Health

➤ As this country and world economic leaders look toward business opportunities of the 21st Century, they often speak of the “Green Economy.” Several Washington companies are leading large and small efforts to respond to transportation challenges that also support greenhouse gas reduction strategies.

Washington’s efforts that support Green Transportation and the Green Economy include:

- Hybrid tug technology developed by Foss Maritime Company optimizes power sources (main engines, generators and batteries) for low power tasks and sudden high thrust situations. The technology can be applied to both new construction and vessel conversion. Foss also is the first company to be accepted into the Environmental Protection Agency’s Smartway Transport Program for its marine operations, which includes a voluntary switch to burn ultra low sulfur diesel.
 - INRIX, an innovative Bellevue-based company has brought to market the most accurate and comprehensive traffic data used by public and private customers throughout the United States and in parts of Europe. Its historical and predictive traffic speed information blends real-time road sensor data with billions of data points from GPS-enabled commercial and consumer devices.
- Our state continues to be a leader in developing markets and opportunities for greener and cleaner vehicles.
- The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency and the Puget Sound Clean Cities Coalition, in collaboration with a consortium of public fleet managers, established Evergreen Fleets, to recognize fleet vehicle operators for saving fuel, improving operational efficiencies, and reducing air emissions. The City of Seattle reduced greenhouse gas emissions in its fleet by 13% in just one year.
 - Cascade Sierra Solutions opened a branch near the Seattle port in its growing work to connect truck operators with programs and grants to upgrade to cleaner diesel and efficiency technologies.
 - Washington, Oregon and California are pursuing a \$100 million federal grant for a West Coast Green Highway Initiative. The states will assist private partners that provide charging stations or other alternative fuels technology.
- Land use patterns, housing and commute trips create transportation challenges. Cheaper rural land has tempted many into longer commutes.

In Snohomish County people living within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), travel an average 12 miles to work; those who live outside UGAs travel 21 miles. Although it is often said that people “drive until they qualify” (for a housing loan), we have learned that many new developments in rural areas are big houses on big lots. The vast majority of affordable housing in Snohomish County remains in urban areas.

• Stewardship

➤ Stewardship seeks continuous improvement in the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the transportation system. Transit agencies in Yakima County provide an excellent example of doing the most with what little you have in a county that lacks a Public Transit Benefit Area (PTBA).

Many different pieces come together to provide public transit in Yakima County. Yakima Transit (YT) is a citywide system that began in 1966 with a household tax and has been funded with .3% sales tax since 1981. YT has only 10 routes but very high ridership, carrying almost 1.5 million passengers last year. A recent two-year grant allowed YT to extend service to the neighboring communities of Selah and Union Gap.

The citizens of Selah subsequently voted to tax themselves to continue YT service. It took two public votes for Union Gap to create its own transit service, with one 30-minute fixed route and a Dial-a-Ride service. With a .2% sales tax providing an 18 month operating reserve fund, Union Gap Transit is considering extending service westward.

Yakima Transit now has a grant to serve the unincorporated Terrace Heights area, which includes the Sno-Kist plant, the

Osteopathic School, and other residential areas east of the Yakima River. But most of Yakima County remains without transit except for two creative programs.

A state-funded Community Connector operated by People to People provides fare-free general public transportation for persons traveling along the I-82 corridor from Yakima to Prosser, where a connection to Ben Franklin Transit is possible. The ADA accessible Community Connector buses stop at designated sites in Yakima, Wapato, Toppenish, Zillah, Granger, Sunnyside, Grandview, and Prosser. And, since 2007, the Yakima Nation’s Tribal Transit program has operated the Pahto Public Passage, looping five times a day through the communities of Toppenish, Wapato, and White Swan and making connections with the Community Connector.

➤ Sound Transit (ST) relies mainly on sales tax and MVET for funding; since passage of ST2 last year, mostly sales tax. As a result, due to the economic downturn, ST anticipates 20% less revenue over the time frame it will take to complete the ST2 package authorized by voters in 2008, including light rail extensions east of Lake Washington, north to Lynnwood, and south to Federal Way. However, ST still expects to deliver on time and within budget by eliminating project reserves, moving forward faster to take advantage of low bids, and maintaining strict cost and scope control on projects.



Electric vehicle charging stall.

• Views Heard at Local Meetings

Each city and county that the Commission visits has transportation challenges, successes and needs. The Commission toured and met with local leaders in each of these cities. Here, we identify (in no priority order) top items in each locality. In every locale, there is a common desire to reduce the conflicts between freight movement and local mobility. Another theme is the lack of revenue for basic preservation and maintenance of local streets and roads.

Spokane Valley



- The City of Spokane's long-term goal is to provide a multi-modal inter- and intra-jurisdictional transportation system that is a catalyst to a vibrant regional economy.
- Greater Spokane Inc., the combined EDC and Chamber of Commerce, wants consistency across boundaries in terms of taxes and transportation infrastructure. Their strategy is to establish and maintain a unified vision, effective governance and a realistic finance plan.
- Due to record snows, highway and road maintenance has been a major transportation challenge in the two previous winters.
- The City of Spokane Valley and the City of Spokane both seek authority to establish a street utility to improve local streets and roads.
- The North Spokane Corridor Project includes independent pedestrian and bike paths as key components as well as room for future high capacity facilities, most likely HOV lanes.
- Car-free mobility is popular and growing in the Spokane region. The County Health Department has used a program called Smart Routes to promote walking and biking, which fits nicely with a YMCA emphasis on youth fitness and neighborhood walkability.
- The Departments of Transportation in Idaho and Washington maintain a close relationship that benefits both states on cross-border projects.
- The Spokane International Airport and the Coeur d'Alene Airport are both growing and providing important links to the regional economy on both sides of the state line.
- Canadian investments in the Port of Prince Rupert and inland transportation improvements position the Inland Northwest Hub to be a key link to competitive commerce for the Spokane and Northern Idaho region.
- There is no transit connection between Spokane and its Idaho neighbors of Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls. Transit would improve workforce access and reduce trips in the I-90 corridor.



Spokane Valley seeks new funding to improve its street network.

Kent



- Auburn, Kent and other Green River valley cities make up the largest industrial center in the Puget Sound and the second largest warehouse distribution complex on the West Coast. The Kent Valley accommodates one-third of all of the Ports of Tacoma and Seattle truck trips in the entire central Puget Sound.
- Truck traffic damages local arterials and Auburn and other cities lack revenue to repair those roads, which will impact trade in the future. Most of the arterials are in poor condition because they are built on a silt and sand foundation common in the valley. Current funding sources do not provide enough money to preserve worn out infrastructure.
- Two overpasses opened in 2009 separating rail and road traffic. Another \$170 million dollars in priority grade separation projects for the Kent area remain unfunded.
- Sounder Commuter Rail is reshaping downtown Kent and Auburn. In 2008 Sounder carried 10 million riders with trips between Seattle/ Everett and Seattle/ Tacoma.
- Most of the roads within the Muckleshoot reservation are a combination of state highways, city streets, county roads and Bureau of Indian Affairs roads. It can be challenging to identify who maintains these facilities. The Tribe is currently working with local jurisdictions in an attempt to turn rural roads within the reservation boundary over to the Tribe.
- The Cascade Bicycle Club argues for the importance of getting cars off the roads; whether the engine is a hybrid or not it still creates congestion. Until land use and transit are improved and auto use reduced, we will continue to see freight stuck in traffic and train grade problems.
- WSDOT has developed the Eastside Corridor Plan as a three-part strategy to address congestion on I-405/SR 167 continuing down to SR 512 (Eastside Corridor). It calls for extending the SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes southbound, building new HOT lanes on I-405 and connecting the two HOT lane systems to address regional population growth and increasing travel demand challenges. Along with completion of SR 509 from Sea-Tac to I-5, the Eastside Corridor will improve freight movement in and around the region.



Building an overpass to improve rail movement and safety.

Yakima



- Three main industries all rely on transportation and impact Yakima as a regional center.
 - Agriculture: truck weight is an issue
 - Medical: emergency vehicle access is an issue
 - Tourism/Recreation: wine and ecotourism must coexist with the industrial needs of agriculture
 Its transportation system needs \$104 million over 20 years, including over \$30 million for maintenance.
- The City of Yakima supports projects with regional impacts and leverages partnerships to “build a cake”:
 - Yakima Downtown Futures Initiative
 - Yakima Sawmill LIFT
 - River Road Industrial Corridor
 - Washington Avenue
 - Yakima Railroad Grade Separation Project
- Reopening Stampede Pass in 1996 increased the need for grade separation in the city. The \$35 million Lincoln Avenue grade separation project creates 161 jobs at a \$30/hr average wage, compared to \$17/hr as the average Yakima County wage.
- DRYVE (Driving Rural Yakima Valley’s Economy) clumps its transportation priorities into four categories:
 - Public safety and health;
 - Ag-tourism and corridor revitalization;
 - Connections between communities; and
 - Freight access and funding.
- The Yakama Indian Nation faces challenges networking with the state; it welcomes more teamwork and wants to be part of the planning process. The Tribe appreciates the help of DRYVE in starting the tribal bus system, Pahto Public Passage.
- WSDOT’s SR 24 project is part of a major watershed restoration effort; it allows for future meander of the Yakima River by doubling the length of the bridge.
- Pass closures have a major economic impact on milk, juice and wine delivery. Lynden Transport calls its employees “everyday heroes.” Because products cannot wait out service disruptions, its employees find a way to overcome emergencies.
- Target Zero is focusing efforts in places such as Yakima County and the Tri-Cities area with high fatality rates per capita. Here, 50% of the fatalities involve impaired driving, as compared to 38% statewide.



Yakima roads carry a lot of agricultural freight.

Part of the solution is “El Protector,” WSP Patrolman Oscar Garcia. He is not only addressing cultural barriers with the Hispanic community, but with the Yakama Nation. He goes into workplaces and orchards to increase knowledge of traffic rules.

There is a similar problem with a disproportionate number of fatalities on the Yakama Reservation. WSP and Tribes are working hand-in-hand on traffic safety including seat belt laws.

Everett



- The top transportation priority for Snohomish County is US 2 east of I-5; it is a joint priority with the City of Everett and cities along US 2. About half the county’s population lies south and west of the Snohomish River Valley along with most of the jobs. Access is severely limited when flooding occurs because the Snohomish and Stillaguamish river valleys and diking systems are designed to overtop. This reduces flood disasters, but increases flood frequency and disruption.
- There is a shared vision in Snohomish County to move people and freight, rather than move cars. Snohomish County has included Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction policies in its comprehensive plan. Because more east-west capacity can’t easily be built, the County, the cities and transit providers want to expand Commute Trip Reduction programs and Bus Rapid Transit.
- Swift Bus Rapid Transit on SR 99 Corridor between Everett and Shoreline is a collaborative effort between Community Transit (county-wide except for the City of Everett) and Everett Transit, a city bus system.
- The Snohomish County road system resembles a ladder, with I-5 and SR 9 as the sidepieces and SR 524, SR 96, US 2, and SR 528 as the rungs. With rapid growth to the north, there is a need to extend I-5 HOV lanes northward and add more rungs to the I-5/SR 9 ladder.
- The Tulalip Tribe is a major economic development driver in the Marysville area. The casino/hotel has created 3400 jobs; other area businesses add about 2600 jobs. The tribe has funded transportation projects, such as the 4th Street improvements, with its own funds, and is mitigating impacts on transportation. At the I-5 and 116th interchange, the Tribe installed a stormwater mitigation system.
- Transportation funding is a priority for Boeing; it is not only a production, but a quality of life issue. For example, between 30-35% of employees use the US-2 trestle. The largest employer of Skagit and Whatcom County residents is Boeing Everett.



Swift Bus Rapid Transit cuts commute times.

All 777 panels for assembly are coming to Everett through the Ports of Seattle, Tacoma and Everett. Boeing is transitioning to bring them all to the Port of Everett.

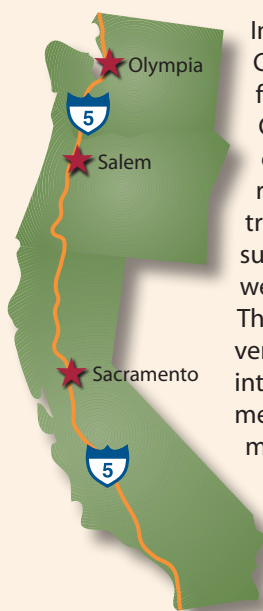
- The Port of Everett generates \$247 million in state and local taxes annually; about \$160 million to state. A deep-water port, it specializes in breakbulk cargo (importing cement from China and windmills from India and Japan; some custom blades built in Sedro Wooley are for export) and has increasing containerized volumes.



Hood Canal Bridge

Part 3: Overview of 2009 Work and Activities

• Joint Work with California and Oregon



In late 2008, members of the West Coast Transportation Commissions from Washington, Oregon and California began conversations regarding critical transportation issues impacting the west coast states.

These periodic conversations evolved into the first joint meeting of Commissioners from the three states in Portland on July 22, 2009. The Washington and

California Commissioners met jointly in Seattle on July 23.

The three Commissions have sent joint letters to the collective West Coast Congressional delegations addressing:

- Transition to a Vehicle Miles Traveled Fee Structure;
- Goods Movement Priorities; and
- Future federal funding priorities.

They will continue to work towards identifying future topics which the three can jointly support.

• Working Toward the 2011 – 2030 WTP

The Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) is a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan that sets a 20-year vision for the development of the statewide trans-

portation system, from state highways and ferries to sidewalks and bike paths, county roads, city streets, public transit, air and rail. The WTP identifies the total unfunded statewide need over 20 years, identifies significant statewide transportation issues, and recommends statewide transportation policies and strategies to the Legislature and Governor (RCW 47.01.071(4)).

By law, the WTP also is required to be consistent with the state's growth management goals, reflect the priorities of government, and address regional needs, including multimodal transportation planning.

A broad-based Advisory Group is assisting the Commission WTP Team in developing the vision, themes and framework for the 2011-2030 WTP. This Advisory Group will help the Commission look ahead to the future needs of the several distinct economic and demographic sectors of our state, evaluate today's transportation system without regard to jurisdictional boundaries and authority, and identify policy and revenue steps that are needed to move our state forward into the next era.

WTP Advisory Group

Commissioners **Carol Moser**, Lead, **Elmira Forner** and **Latisha Hill**

Ashley Probart, Association of Washington Cities

Bill LaBorde, Transportation Choices

Bob Saunders/Justin Brandt,
Department of Ecology

Brian Smith/Elizabeth Robbins,
WSDOT Strategic Planning and Programming

Charlie Howard,
Transportation Planning Director, PSRC

Chris Townsend, Puget Sound Partnership

Christina O'Claire, King County Metro

Egils Milbergs,
Economic Development Commission

Gary Chandler, Association of Washington Business

Gary Rowe, Washington
State Association of Counties

Gordon Rogers, Transportation Planning Director,
Whatcom Council of Governments

Teresa Berntsen, Governor's Office

Karen Schmidt,
Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board

Kirk Vinish, Transportation Planner, Lummi Nation

Nancy Hiteshue/Mike Groesch,
Washington Roundtable

Robin Rettew,
OFM Senior Budget Assistant, Transportation

Geri Poor, Port of Seattle

Steve Lind,
Washington State Traffic Safety Commission

Karen Larkin/Joyce Phillips,
Department of Commerce

The Commission will seek public comment and input as the Plan is developed and release a Draft Plan in summer 2010. After many opportunities for public comment during the fall, the Commission will make final revisions, adopt and submit a plan to the Governor and Legislature in December 2010.

• Ferry Customer Survey Update

Legislation enacted in 2007 directs the Transportation Commission to gather data on ferry users to help inform level of service, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions. The initial survey, completed in 2008, made it clear that ferry ridership is a very complex system and one research tool doesn't fit across the board.

The 2009-2010 survey will add another element of complexity. Unlike the last survey where customers completed a one-time survey, the object this time is to track their usage through regular on-line web surveys from the Commission, WSF or perhaps the Ferry Advisory Committees.

A professional consultant will select 13,500 people/panels for a long-term (longitudinal) survey. Once this database is created, there are on-going opportunities to learn.

• Tolling Policy, Toll Setting and Ferry Tariffs

Ferries

In September 2009, the Commission increased ferry tariffs by an average of 2.5% for state ferries and continued to implement Tariff Route Equity. The Commission also made permanent the In-Need Organizations Program that allows a non-profit organization to purchase tickets at a discount for distribution to persons in need. Discussions began with Ferry Advisory Committees, legislators and WSDOT regarding establishment of an advisory group for tariff setting.

Tacoma Narrows Bridge

Traffic volume on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB) continues to meet projections. As a result, and in response to the economic downturn, the Commission kept toll rates at the levels it set in 2008. The basic car toll is \$4.00, with each additional axle charged \$2.00. Reflecting the lower cost of electronic toll collection, transponder-equipped vehicles pay \$2.75 per car, and higher charges for each additional axle.

Due to significantly higher bond payments that begin in 2010 and repayment of a \$5.2 million loan provided at the bridge opening in 2007, a toll increase will be necessary in 2010.

SR 167 High Occupancy/Toll (HOT) Lane Pilot

The first year of the SR 167 HOT Lane pilot saw variable toll rates reduced to increase use of the HOT Lanes. Over 1,700 drivers each weekday are now buying into the HOT Lanes paying an average toll of \$1.00 and saving up to 10 minutes during peak travel times. The toll revenue helps to pay for operations, maintenance, enforcement, and incident response.

Other Tolling Policy

The Commission began discussions with the State Treasurer toward development of tolling policies and practices that would ensure stability and predictability of toll revenue and generate adequate reserve levels. Adoption of such policies could ensure the lowest borrowing rates and prevent sudden, unexpected toll increases.

As an initial step in this direction, the Commission adopted a policy that cash tolls, which are more costly to collect, would remain more expensive than electronically collected tolls. The Commission also began consulting with tolling experts from different systems around the country.

• Aviation Planning Council

The Council, chaired by Commissioner Carol Moser, made several recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and Transportation Commission in July 2009 on how to best

meet statewide commercial and general aviation capacity needs today and in the future. The Council found that there is no need to site a new commercial airport in the state at this time. Its recommendations emphasize better land use regulation to reduce incompatible development near existing commercial and general aviation airports and better utilization of regional airports through strategic investment.



• Facility Naming

In response to Senate Joint Memorial 8006, the Commission designated SR 502 the Battle Ground Highway and a portion of SR 503 the Lewisville Highway.

The Commission named the portion of SR 529 from Everett to the junction of SR 528 in Marysville, the "Yellow Ribbon Highway" to honor the service and sacrifices of our active duty service members serving around the world for Washington State and our nation.

In June, at its Spokane Valley meeting, the Commission named the 10.5 mile bicycle and pedestrian trail that parallels the North Spokane Corridor the "Children of the Sun Trail".

In October, the Commission named the I-405 and 116th Street Bridge for Kollin Nielsen, a construction engineer who was killed near that site by a drunk driver.

In October, the Commission named the new 64-car ferry "Chetzemoka."

• Road Jurisdiction Transfer

In 2009, the Legislature transferred the responsibility for approving route jurisdiction changes by the state, a county or a city from the Transportation Improvement Board to the Transportation Commission. The Commission approved its first request in October and will forward to the Legislature its recommendation that SR 908 be transferred from the state to the jurisdiction of the cities of Redmond and Kirkland.



Winter conditions require extra maintenance work.

Priority Focus

In addition to meeting its statutory obligations, the Commission adopted the following policy platform to emphasize pressing issues in its ongoing work program.

Operational Safety of Highways

The Commission, in speaking with regional representatives throughout the state, has found that rural two-lane roads need greater focus regarding their capacity and condition. WSDOT data continues to confirm that such roadways, both county and state, are the most dangerous in the state. Capital improvement options are limited for many reasons, not the least of which is the unavailability of sufficient funds. The Commission will continue to coordinate efforts with the WSP and the Washington Traffic Safety Commission in addressing cost-effective ways to finance and address rural safety needs.

There are effective, less costly operational fixes that can enhance the level of safety on two-lane roads with known dangerous locations and segments and we suggest these approaches be taken when possible:

- Increase use of electronic signage displaying the speed of passing cars.
- Add safety warning signs and reduce speed limits.
- Improve traffic throughput in populated areas and give more focus to safety of residents.
- On rural roads with considerable residential development, WSDOT should moderate its priority of increasing traffic throughput and give more focus to residents' safety.
- Work to improve adequate shoulder space on county roads.

Exploring Alternative Sources of Transportation Revenue

Today's reality involves relatively high gasoline prices, less revenue for transportation, continuing demand for safer and improved transportation facilities, growing maintenance and preservation demands, the associated issue of climate change, and a greater effort to be more responsible in cleaning up and managing pollutants from run-off from our highways and roads. We must intensify efforts to meet these challenges and suggest the following:

- If transportation funding is to be sustainable long-term, we must consider alternatives beyond traditional approaches. A vehicle miles traveled (VMT) based system in which drivers pay for the miles they drive with per-mile rates varying according to location, time of day, and day of week is a technically feasible approach. However, it appears doubtful that one state can implement such a system on its own. While there are serious political challenges with such a concept in the short term, the topic is gaining interest nationwide and is actively being discussed in Washington, D.C. One possible approach that would allow time for development while keeping the idea moving forward would be to implement a federally funded pilot VMT-based project on the West Coast – perhaps an I-5 “Corridor of the Future” project. This idea is advocated by the West Coast Transportation Commissions.
- Consider imposing a state carbon tax structure based upon fuel type. Ordinarily this concept would be a long term notion in this country and in Washington State. However, such taxes are being implemented in other parts of the world and should be acted upon in the near future in this state and nation.

- Other alternative funding sources that should be reviewed for application to everything from ferries to road maintenance:
 - Increase vehicle registration fees.
 - Reinstitute some form of a value-based vehicle "excise tax" with a reasonable depreciation schedule.
 - Increase the use of tolling in urban and suitable rural areas.
 - Explore, using cost-benefit analysis, public/private partnership investments in delivering capital construction projects and how such investments can be employed to help shape our economic and environmental future around sustainable mobility.

Pricing

Tolling and congestion pricing should be applied over time where appropriate, to transportation facilities as identified in the Commission's 2006 Tolling Study. Pricing has been proven to be an effective means to manage congestion, maximize the efficient use of scarce transportation resources, and reducing VMT which carries climate change benefits. Tolling has these effects in virtually all cases in which demand out-paces capacity, including both roads and ferries. Indeed, the recent experience in the United States with relatively high gas prices began to demonstrate the impact of pricing on personal transportation decisions. We must act now to move critical tolling projects forward.

Economic Vitality

Transportation budget and policy decisions must continue to meet the needs of the entire state and its transportation network. Economic vitality and transportation are directly tied to one another, and therefore must remain a high priority in all transportation policy and funding deliberations and decisions. Economic vitality should be included in statute as a priority goal for planning and funding transportation investments statewide.



The safety and mobility improvements of Tacoma Narrows Bridge are paid for with tolls.

Puget Sound Partnership

Untreated stormwater and other run off from paved surfaces has been identified as a primary source of pollution for our streams, rivers and the Puget Sound. Given direct role, the Department of Transportation should enhance its relationship with the Puget Sound Partnership and other relevant agencies to help develop a stronger joint approach to cleaning up Puget Sound and surrounding watersheds, streams

and rivers. The inter-relationship between transportation and environmental protection is becoming more apparent and must become a joint venture.

Emissions Reduction

Washington State's major source of carbon emissions comes from the transportation sector. A policy framework is being

established that pushes our state to find ways to reduce emissions. Some old ideas need new emphasis and action:

- Enhancements to alternative modes of transportation including bicycle paths, sidewalks, and transit systems.
- Incentive programs aimed at getting private vehicle owners and public transportation agencies to drive vehicles that use pollution free alternative fuel sources.
- Establishment of a national carbon tax and/or a cap and trade program.
- Encourage and support a revenue system based on vehicle miles traveled.
- Provide better connectivity between modes of travel that encourage use of existing public transportation.
- Provide more passenger rail / public transportation on corridors that demonstrate high average daily trips by single occupant vehicles, or the potential of high demand given the travel characteristics of those corridors.



International trade is a major part of Washington's economy.

Washington State Transportation Commission

Roles and Responsibilities

Key Facts

The Commission is a seven member body of citizens appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for six-year terms. The Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation and a representative from the Governor's Office are ex officio members of the Commission.

The Commission provides a public forum for transportation policy development. It reviews and evaluates how the entire transportation system works across the state and issues the state's 20-year Transportation Plan. As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission sets tolls for state highways and bridges and fares for Washington State Ferries.



- Transportation finance and funding.
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system.
- Transportation infrastructure needs.
- Transportation efficiencies that will improve service delivery and intermodal coordination and connectivity.
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers.
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology based solutions.
- Climate change initiatives and challenges facing transportation.

Current Responsibilities

Washington Transportation Plan

Every four years, the Commission recommends to the Legislature a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan. The plan must be consistent with the state's growth management goals and be based upon transportation policy goals adopted by the Legislature. The plan is required to reflect the priorities of government and address local, regional and statewide needs, including multimodal transportation planning. The next updated plan is due December 2010.

State Ferry Fare Setting and State Highway Toll Responsibilities

- The Commission is the state's tolling authority, setting tolls for the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, SR 520, the SR 167 HOT Lanes pilot project, and any future toll facilities authorized on state owned facilities.
- The Commission reviews and adjusts the state ferry system fare schedule and adopts fare and pricing policies.
- The Commission reviews the long-range ferry system capital plan and operational strategies.

Ferry Customer Survey

The Commission is required to survey ferry customers every two years. Data gathered is used to help inform level of service, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions for the state ferry system.

Policy Guidance

The Commission offers policy guidance and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature in key issue areas including but not limited to:

Public Involvement & Outreach

The Commission conducts its public outreach program primarily through meetings held in both Olympia and localities throughout the state each year. Meetings held outside of Olympia focus on local and regional transportation issues and challenges, receiving information from local officials, public agencies, and other entities. In addition to regular meetings, the Commission convenes periodic regional forums to gather citizen input on various transportation issues.

Transportation Innovative Partnerships (TIP) Program

The Commission may solicit concepts or proposals for eligible public-private partnership projects. In consultation with the Governor, the Commission may execute, reject or continue negotiations on proposed public-private partnership projects.

Accountability

Consistent with developing a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, the Commission reviews and evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of state and local transportation systems. Determinations are reported to the Governor and Legislature each year.

Route Jurisdiction Transfer Program

The Commission is required to consider and act upon possible additions, deletions, or other changes to the state highway system. The Commission receives, reviews, evaluates and assesses petitions from cities, counties, or the WSDOT requesting changes to the state highway system. Once the review is done, the Commission makes a final finding and forwards its recommendation to the Legislature for final action in law.

Studies and Projects In Progress for the 2009-11 Biennium

- Updating the Washington Transportation Plan – a 20-year vision for statewide transportation.
- Conducting the second system-wide ferry customer survey and updating baseline data.

Commissioners



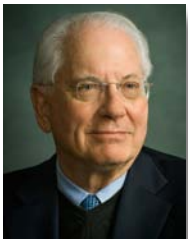
Carol Moser, Chair

Carol's background as a City Councilwoman brings a local government perspective to the Commission. In addition to serving ten years on the Richland City Council, Carol was appointed to the Association of Washington Cities Board of Directors in 2002, and was a Board Member on the Municipal Research Services Center until accepting the appointment on the Commission. Her primary focus for the Council, however, was transportation. She served on the Regional Transportation Planning Organization for the Benton-Franklin-Walla Walla Policy Advisory Council, the Ben-Franklin Transit board, and served four years on the State's Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board. Carol also chaired the Three Rivers Community Roundtable Transportation Focus Group, and the Smart Growth/Livable Communities Committee.



Bob Distler, Vice-Chair

Bob came to the Commission with an economics background and a career in transportation management, having worked in marketing, planning, operations and government and industry affairs. He has consulted for clients worldwide, including airlines, railroads and cruise lines. Since moving to Orcas Island in 1992, Bob has been involved with Washington State Ferries and San Juan County government, focusing on transportation and growth management issues. Bob was appointed to the Commission in 2005.



Richard Ford, member

Richard contributes port and legal experience to the Commission. He is senior counsel of the international law firm K&L Gates LLP, and spent more than 30 years in public service, retiring in 1985 as Executive Director of the Port of Seattle. Richard has also served on a number of key boards and commissions, including Premera (Blue Cross), Casey Family Programs,

the Climate Change Transportation Work Group - a sub-committee to the Governor's Climate Advisory Team, Governor's Growth Strategies Commission, Washington State Marine Oversight Board, Citizen Advisory Panel on Council Elections, and the RTA Regional Outreach Committee. Richard was appointed to the Commission in 2004 and was reappointed in 2007.



Elmira Forner, member

Elmira contributes experience in both local and state government having served as a Planning Commissioner for the City of Kent, as well as serving as State Representative from the 47th District. While in the Legislature she served five years on the Transportation Committee. Elmira was appointed to the Commission by Governor Locke in 2000 and re-appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2006. During her time as a commissioner she served five years on the Transportation Permitting and Accountability Committee and two years on the Transportation Performance Audit Board. She is presently active in transportation issues in North Central Washington.



Latisha Hill, member

Latisha is employed by Avista Utilities and brings to the Commission experience in urban and regional planning, community development, public affairs, and economic development. She has served on the City of Spokane Mayor's Sustainability initiative as the Transportation and Mobility co-chair.

Latisha has served as an officer of the Inland Empire Chapter of the American Planning Association and serves on various business and community boards. She has a Masters degree in Urban & Regional Planning and a B.A. in Communications. Latisha is actively involved in transportation and economic development efforts in Eastern Washington and was appointed to the Commission in 2008.



Dan O'Neal, member

Dan, a member since 2003, is on the Board of Directors of The Greenbrier Companies (GBX), a publicly traded railroad car leasing and manufacturing company. He has owned and operated transportation and software businesses. Dan has actively participated in efforts to gain private and public sector support for improved freight transportation infrastructure. He is a member of the Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council and the Cascade Land Conservancy. Prior to joining a law firm in 1980 he was Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. He had been Transportation Counsel to the Senate Commerce Committee chaired by Senator Warren Magnuson.



Philip Parker, member

Philip brings a varied background to the Commission. He recently retired as a Journeyman Electrician and has taught in the electrical apprenticeship program. Philip has represented the Vancouver community on many boards with a recent focus on workforce development and transportation issues. Philip was appointed to the Commission in 2007.

Footnotes

¹ The Department of Commerce defines a “tourist” as someone who travels more than 50 miles one-way (not including a regular business commute) or who stays overnight away from home.

² RCW 47.01.071 (4).

³ Demographic change and structural economic change are two other factors driving long-term demand for transit improvements.

⁴ In some ways, climate change policy will hit rail hard. Although rail will benefit when shipping shifts from truck to rail, less reliance on coal-generated electricity will impact those railroads, including BNSF, that haul coal, which constitutes about 25% of the rail business in the US.

⁵ The existing round of transit service reductions, maintenance deferrals and deferred bus purchases have air quality and energy impacts and also increase transit operating expenses both short-run and long-term.

⁶ Lewis, Rebecca, Knaap, Gerrit-Jan and Sohn, Jungyul “Managing Growth With Priority Funding Areas: A Good Idea Whose Time Has Yet to Come”, Journal of the American Planning Association, 75: 4, 457 - 478.

⁷ For instance, 5.9 GHz Dedicated Short Range Communication (DSRC) supports not only on-road cashless transactions, but allows for system interoperability, open procurement, multiple users and complex system interfaces whereby vehicles can communicate with each other for speed optimization in congested areas.

⁸ Even in good fiscal times, TIB received about \$8 in requests for every \$1 it had available to grant.

⁹ Cities and counties may not impose a tax without statutory or constitutional authority. In 1995, the Washington Supreme Court invalidated a city street utility charge, characterizing it as a property tax in violation of the uniformity requirement of the state constitution. Covell v. Seattle, 127 Wn.2d 874, 905 P.2d 324 (1995). The City of Seattle was charging \$2 per month per single family home and \$1.35 per month per multi-family housing unit.

In the course of invalidating the City of Seattle street utility charge, the Washington Supreme Court established a three-part test to distinguish whether a charge is a fee or a tax:

1. whether the primary purpose of the charge is to raise revenue or to regulate
2. whether the charges collected are allocated only for the authorized regulatory purpose
3. whether a direct relationship exists between the fee charged and the service received by those who pay.

Covell at 879.

¹⁰ The Commission has published a white paper regarding the street utility proposal, which is available from our office.

¹¹ <http://cahnrsnews.wsu.edu/reportertools/news/2008/transport-econ-2008-09.html>

¹² Tourism is the state’s third largest export industry after aerospace and software, bringing in \$14.8 billion in 2007.

¹³ Damage from the 2009 storms totaled \$38,457,433 to the WSDOT routes system and \$16,695,912 to county and city roads.

¹⁴ The challenge of maintaining freight roads is not limited to agricultural areas with freeze-thaw conditions. Although Yakima County does not have the seasonal weather conditions that impact other regions, its county engineer also considers access to and from the state highway system the most critical traffic flow issue for its 609 mile local freight system. Lewis, Pierce and Snohomish Counties also categorize over 200 miles inadequate for all-weather use in each county.

¹⁵ King County operates a year-round water taxi connecting downtown Seattle and Vashon Island and a seasonal water taxi between downtown Seattle and West Seattle. Unlike the ferry operations of the four other counties and the state, the King County water taxis are passenger-only service.

Photo Credits

Thanks to the Washington State Department of Transportation photo library; Paul Parker; Community Transit; County Road Administration Board; Transportation Improvement Board; City of Spokane Valley; and Sound Transit.



**Washington State
Transportation Commission**

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