



CONNECTING WASHINGTON: A PLAN FOR MAINTAINING OUR VITAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

In July 2011, Governor Gregoire convened the Connecting Washington Task Force to create a 10-year strategy to maintain and improve the state's transportation system. Composed of 30 key leaders from the Legislature, local and tribal governments, port authorities, transit agencies, business, labor and the environmental community, the Task Force explored a number of issues and delivered these key findings:



Our transportation system forms the backbone of Washington's economy. It provides the vital connections that link our homes to our work places and carry our products to market. State highways and ferries, county and city streets, transit systems, rail networks, airports and seaports must all be well-coordinated and -maintained so people and goods can move safely and efficiently throughout the state.

Our state's population is projected to grow by more than 28 percent during the next decade. This will place even greater demands upon our transportation system. The number of vehicle miles traveled each year in Washington is projected to reach 60 billion by 2020; annual freight volumes are expected to triple by 2035; and the number of passengers using transit in the central Puget Sound region is estimated to grow 90 percent by 2040.

At the same time that demands on our transportation system are increasing, we are losing the purchasing power we need to maintain and improve the system:

- » The elimination of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax, through passage of Initiative 695 in 1999, cut revenue by \$750 million annually.
 - » Fuel tax revenue, which accounts for nearly three-fourths of all state transportation funding, is shrinking. Washington residents are driving fewer miles per capita and vehicles are becoming more fuel efficient. New federal efficiency requirements and the emergence of electric vehicles will accelerate this trend. Between March 2007 and 2023, fuel tax revenues are projected to fall by more than \$5 billion.
 - » The sales tax, which provides most funding for transit services, plummeted during the 2008 recession, and has yet to recover.
 - » The purchasing power of fees and charges that help to fund the transportation system is steadily eroding because they are not indexed to inflation or adjusted annually.
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Actions by the Legislature have provided funding for critical construction projects, but there is insufficient ongoing funding for maintenance and operations, or for improvements. Fuel tax increases in 2003 and 2005 made it possible to issue bonds to pay for 421 transportation projects throughout the state. Funding generated by those increases is fully committed to debt service, and the remaining revenue is not sufficient to meet current maintenance for future project needs.

Since the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation issued its recommendations in 2000, the Legislature took the following actions to establish a single point of accountability for Washington's transportation system:

- » Created the Transportation Performance Audit Board to evaluate benchmarks, investment criteria and performance measures.
- » Made the Washington State Department of Transportation a cabinet agency.
- » Made the Office of Financial Management responsible for establishing performance measures for the statutory transportation goals and preparing a biennial progress report.

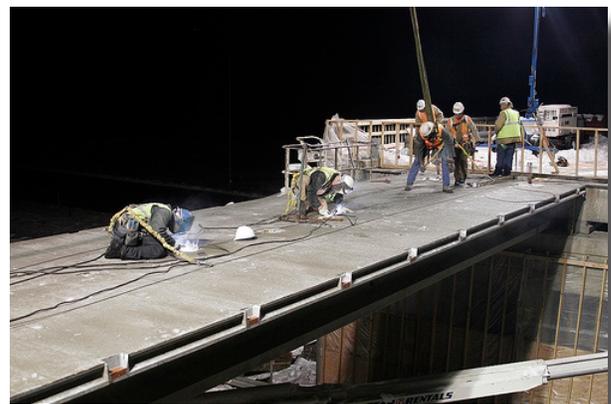
The state has provided unprecedented accountability to the taxpayers. To date, more than 300 of the 421 projects funded by the 2003 and 2005 investment packages have been completed. More than 90 percent were finished on time — and on or below budget.

These investments have produced substantial benefits for the public, such as reducing traffic fatalities by 6 percent from 2008 and 2009, and cutting travel delays 21 percent between 2007 and 2009.

TO MAINTAIN OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THESE ACTIONS:

The Legislature should adopt a 10-year strategy to make transportation investments that will strengthen our economy and protect and create jobs. The investments should be guided by the following principles:

- » Preserve existing transportation systems and services.
- » Improve mobility for people and commerce.
- » Enhance the safety and efficiency of the transportation system.
- » Provide community and environmental improvements that attract, keep and expand private businesses and a highly skilled workforce.



The Governor and Legislature should select specific investments that meet the following performance objectives:

- » System preservation – To repair and maintain the statewide system of roads, streets and bridges, and to operate and maintain ferries and transit services.
- » Strategic mobility improvements – To relieve congestion in specific corridors, thereby improving the movement of people and goods.

- » System efficiency – To improve connections among modes (such as rail-truck, ferry-transit, car-transit), enhance speed and reliability, and improve cost effectiveness.
- » Safety – To reduce fatalities and serious injuries across all modes of transportation.



An investment of \$21 billion should be made during the next 10 years to accomplish the above objectives.

While the Task Force estimates the amount needed to fully address the objectives is approximately \$50 billion, it also recognizes this turbulent economy. Thus it proposes a lower level of investment that will still preserve the system as well as provide funds for strategic investments to strengthen Washington's economy and create jobs. Types of investments that should be funded include the following:

- » SR 167 Tacoma to Puyallup new corridor – construct the first stage of a new alignment between SR 509 in Tacoma and SR 512 in Puyallup. (\$1.2 billion)
- » SR 509 Des Moines to SeaTac – extend SR 509 south from SeaTac to I-5. (\$800 million)
- » I-405 Renton to Bellevue – continue widening of the I-405 corridor between Renton and Bellevue. (\$500 million)
- » I-5 Columbia River Crossing – replace the Columbia River Bridge. (\$450 million)
- » SR 520 Bellevue Corridor improvements – construct improvements at the 124th and 148th Street interchanges. (\$350 million)
- » I-5 JBLM – construct interchange improvements at Berkeley Drive and Thorne Lane, plus additional interchange improvements throughout the corridor. (\$350 million)
- » I-405 Renton to Bellevue Interchange improvement – build the first segment of the I-405/SR 167 interchange. (\$325 million)
- » U.S. 395 North Spokane Corridor – continue construction of the new corridor further south toward the Spokane River. (\$260 million)
- » SR 522/U.S. 2 Kenmore to Monroe Corridor Safety – complete the widening of SR 522 between Woodinville and Monroe. (\$155 million)
- » Replacement of 144-car ferry – provide a new, 144-car vessel to replace the existing vessel, which has exceeded its useful life. (\$150 million)
- » I-90 Snoqualmie Pass – continue widening from the end of the snowshed project near Keechelus Dam to Bonnie Creek, including the construction of the wildlife overcrossing. (\$106 million)
- » U.S. 12 near Walla Walla – complete the new alignment work. (\$120 million)
- » I-5 Bellingham interchange safety improvements – construct improvements in the vicinity of Iowa Street in Bellingham. (\$50 million)

- » SR 902/Spokane – construct intersection and ramp improvements at the Medical Lake and Geiger Road interchanges. (\$40 million)
- » SR 28 East Wenatchee corridor improvements – construct the Cascade Avenue Interchange at U.S. 2/SR 97 and SR 28. (\$30 million)
- » I-82 Red Mountain interchange – construct new interchange to improve access to area vineyards. (\$26 million)

Together, these critical projects represent a total potential state investment of \$5.4 billion.

Yet there are other essential transportation projects not listed in the category above, including:

- » Making the I-5 Federal Way triangle improvements (\$60 million)
- » Widening I-82 near Yakima (\$37 million)
- » Constructing truck climbing lanes on I-82 south of Ellensburg (\$14 million)
- » Constructing interchange improvements on SR 512 in Lakewood (\$550 million)
- » Widening I-205 near Vancouver (\$50 million)

The total potential state investment for these projects is \$1.8 billion.

The potential state investment that would be necessary for **all** priority projects is nearly \$7.2 billion.

The Legislature should educate the public and act on these recommendations.

The needs of our transportation system are critical. If we delay making these critical investments, costs will rise, our citizens will lose more time in traffic congestion and our products will take longer to get to market, making our enterprises less competitive in world markets. If we act boldly, as earlier generations have, to invest in our transportation system, we can lift our economy, create jobs and help to build the future prosperity of Washington.