Cascadia Innovation Corridor: The World’s First Sustainable Mega-region

Chris Gregoire
CEO, Challenge Seattle
Former Governor, Washington State
Challenge Seattle members
Challenge Seattle’s areas of focus

- **CASCADIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR**
  Building on the shared strengths of the Cascadia mega-region

- **EDUCATION**
  Establishing a world-class workforce right here at home

- **MIDDLE-INCOME HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**
  Protecting the health, vibrancy, & diversity of our communities

- **TRANSPORTATION**
  Sparking innovative solutions that keep our region moving
Cascadia Innovation Corridor

STEERING COMMITTEE

Initiative CEOs:

Chris Gregoire  
CEO Challenge Seattle &  
Former Governor, WA State

Greg D’Avignon  
CEO Business Council of  
British Columbia

Our Vision: Cascadia 2035

Cascadia is recognized as a global center of innovation. We compete economically, empower our communities to thrive, tackle the most persistent societal problems in our region and share our success with the world.
Mega-regions: today’s economic powerhouses

29 mega-regions globally, 11 in North America. Together, they represent $3.6T in annual economic output.

Cascadia mega-region:
- Connects Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, and Vancouver, BC
- $72,804 GDP per capita
- 9.1 million people
- 30% population growth 2000-2020


Characteristics of a Mega-Region
1. Contain at least two existing metro areas
2. Population over 5 million
3. GDP over $300 billion
Today’s high-growth mega-regions, including Cascadia, suffer from similar challenges

- **Lack of Affordable Housing**: >50% of Cascadia residents who are housing cost-burdened.
- **Severe Traffic Congestion**: 11.1 days - Time the average commuter in Cascadia spends on the road each year.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**: 4.1 Million Metric tons of CO$_2$e emitted by single-occupancy vehicles in Cascadia each year.

1. U.S. Census Bureau; Real Estate Board of Vancouver; Statistics Canada
2. Estimated using DataIQ (US Census) and Statistics Canada measurements for percentage of single occupancy commuting vehicles
Other mega-regions prove traditional patterns of growth don’t solve the problem

Build “up” through increased densification

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
  Ex: The Bay Area has emissions 12% below Cascadia¹

- Increased housing costs
  Ex: Median home prices in the Bay Area are 8.5x median income²

OR

Build “out” through increased sprawl

- Reduced housing costs
  Ex: Median home prices in the Texas Triangle³ are 3.5x median income⁴

- Increased greenhouse gas emissions
  Ex: Emissions in the Texas Triangle are 2x per capita the levels in Cascadia⁵

² US Census
³ Texas Triangle = mega-region connecting Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, TX
⁴ US Census
⁵ US Census
Estimated population growth proves we need to think bigger

3-4 Million
Estimated increase in population in Cascadia by 2050

1.5M into our existing urban cores through increased densification

800,000 into our existing mid-sized cities through increased densification

1.3M unaccounted for by current capacity – the equivalent of two Vancouver, BC’s
Without big changes, accommodating population growth dramatically worsens existing challenges.
We need big, bold ideas if we are to create a sustainable mega-region

**Housing & Development:**
median housing cost is ≤30% of median income

**Transportation:**
projected population growth absorbed without an increase in traffic congestion

**Environmental Stewardship:**
Reduce CO2e emissions by 80%, meeting Paris Climate Accord targets
Cascadia can become an example to the world as the first sustainable mega-region

1. Densify current urban centers

2. Grow existing mid-size cities

3. Build new “hub” cities

4. Connect it all via Ultra Highspeed Transportation & broadband
Building new “hub” cities is not a new idea

Brazos Valley, TX

Forest City, Malaysia
COVID disruption provides a new opportunity to embrace this concept

74%
Of companies plan to permanently shift to more remote work post-COVID

77%
Of executives say allowing employees to work remotely may lead to lower operating costs

35% - 40%
Increase in productivity for remote workers v. those in corporate offices

17%
Reduction in daily global greenhouse gas emissions Jan-April 2020 vs. 2019 levels

1. Gartner, What CIOs Need to Know About Managing Remote and Virtual Teams through the COVID-19 Crisis
2. Gartner, How to Cultivate Effective "Remote Work" Programs, 2019
Our plan would reverse Cascadia’s current path toward unaffordability and congestion.
Ultra Highspeed Transportation study and planning underway

- Phase 1: Feasibility Study – completed December 2017
  - Highlights:
    - $24-$42B capital costs
    - Potential to cover operating and maintenance costs as early as 2035

- Phase 2: Business Case Analysis – completed July 2019
  - Highlights:
    - $156-$300M estimated annual revenues by 2040;
    - $355B estimated additional economic activity generated;
    - Reduce emissions by 6M metric tons over 40 years

- Phase 3: Governance, financing, and engagement plans development
  - Under contract with report due December 1, 2020.

Jointly funded by Washington, British Columbia, Oregon, and Microsoft
Highspeed transportation and broadband connectivity are at the core of this vision
Working together, we can make Cascadia the world’s first sustainable mega-region