2021 Reflections and Recommendations

Are we there yet?
No, we’ve been re-routed
Message from the Transportation Commission Chair

As we continue to anticipate future stabilization in a post-pandemic world, 2021 was a year of tempered progress with our state slowly rebounding from the impacts of COVID-19, seemingly becoming more of an endemic as time passes, given its constant and continued presence. Traffic on our state highways rebounded in 2021, with travel volumes being spread more throughout the day. Exceptionally high levels of telework continue and delivery of goods to homes remains at historically high levels with Washingtonians continuing to rely on e-commerce as a foundational way of getting the supplies and products they need.

Our core infrastructure needs remain, with highway maintenance and preservation falling further behind as we face growing climate change impacts and unprecedented weather events from record snowfall to unrelenting rain and flooding, impacting our mountain passes, rural communities, and urban areas. And our ferry-served communities continue to feel the impact of the pandemic and the insufficient capacity and resilience of our ferry fleet, with worker shortages further exacerbating an already strained and exhausted system.

Despite all these challenges, which can at times feel unsurmountable, our state and country has proven over the course of history to be resilient and strong. The first silver lining emerged in 2021 with the passage of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), representing a long-overdue infusion of funding into our nation’s transportation system, advancing opportunities for innovation, and prioritizing climate mitigation programs that will enable us to evolve our systems and create a future our kids will want to inherit. Washington State and its local jurisdictions will benefit from the IIJA and stands to receive even more critical transportation funding over the coming years, via the various competitive grant programs the federal act created.

And optimism abounds as we look across our state, witnessing undaunted ingenuity and problem-solving, as important work and critical services continue to be delivered in our urban and rural areas. Our partners at the regional and local levels have inspired us, as they continually demonstrate their commitment to the well-being and prosperity of their communities.

As we chart a path out of the turbulent times we live in, the challenges we face cannot overwhelm nor deter us. With bold and decisive leadership, we can overcome and advance. To this end, the findings and recommendations contained in this report are designed to help support our transportation system’s forward progress and our state’s long-term recovery, emphasizing the need to consistently cultivate innovation and creativity, encourage and reward compassion and understanding, and establish mechanisms that advance an accessible and equitable transportation system for all.

Sincerely,

Roy Jennings, Chair
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As we contemplate how to actively shape our transportation system into the future, the key to our statewide success will depend on the strengths of our partnerships. Our partners and colleagues have provided insightful input over the last year, leading to the crystallization of four Big Ideas that if acted upon, will jump-start the evolution of our transportation system.

**Bring Sustainability to our Ferry System**

Our ferry system is facing a crisis, with most solutions requiring years to implement. Meanwhile, ferries serve as a critical marine highway system connecting our island communities and towns across the Puget Sound. This service comes at a real cost to riders, as ferry fares have increased every year for over a decade. It also carries social and economic costs to our ferry-served communities, making it very challenging to sustain small businesses and ensure affordable access for all.

**Actions**

- Establish a long-term, sustainable funding source for the ferry system that can support both capital needs and operating costs. The dedicated funding source should prioritize capital funding for new boats and additionally, could bring relief to fare payers by allowing fares to stabilize, removing the need for continued annual fare increases in the face of declining service. The current average farebox recovery level is 69% which is significantly higher than those seen in the transit and rail sectors. The time has come to provide more boats for reliable service and consider stabilizing fares in support of rider affordability.

- Identify ways to enhance and support access to transit services, including increased parking availability at terminals, and facilitating the provision of last mile connections that will allow riders to safely and conveniently walk-on to the ferry.

- In support of the WSF Work Force Plan, enhance employee retention by eliminating seasonal layoffs. While there are changes in service demands between seasons, the work continues and having in place a stable, experienced, adequate level of crewing will support WSF’s ability to provide operational reliability.

- Increase wages to attract and retain a diverse workforce and increase training and development of key positions. Also extend the Pre-Apprenticeship & Support Services (PASS) Program to WSF to provide financial support and training to women, minorities, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals seeking to secure required credentials.


**One Size Does not Fit All – Rural Washington Needs Customized Project Delivery Approach**

30 of the 39 counties in Washington State are considered rural, and the infrastructure backlog and needs in rural parts of the state continue to grow. Applying a “one size fits all” approach to our statewide transportation system where capacity increases are generally discouraged, further challenges rural areas. While capacity increase limitations may make sense in urban/congested environments, it also makes sense to conduct a customized assessment of the rural transportation system to ensure their unique needs are not lost in broader state-level policies.

Rural communities also struggle to compete for funding against their urban and suburban counterparts under the current transportation project prioritization process. Adding to this challenge is the fact that rural communities have very limited ability to raise their own tax revenues due to small populations. As a result, they often have significant difficulty meeting large-scale investment needs. Increased investment in rural areas will result in more reliable and equitable access for communities, improved freight movement, and increased safety.

**Actions**

- To increase opportunity for rural projects to be funded and to provide more focused investments in rural areas, a customized project prioritization system which ranks rural projects separate from urban/suburban projects is needed to ensure balanced investments.
  - Traffic volumes cannot be the primary criteria when ranking rural projects - safety, community access, and other unique aspects of rural roads must be measured.
  - A rural highway may have low traffic volumes but may be the only access to communities, providing critical connections for emergency access, the transport of agricultural goods, tourism, etc.
  - Rural roads face increased risks for failure including: washouts due to slope erosion; aging bridges serving as vital links over water; extended inclement weather requiring fortified investments to achieve all-weather road status; etc.
  - In some cases, rural highways are the only or main access to a major attraction, like US 101 to the Olympic National Park, attracting millions of visitors that provide tourism revenue and vital economic activity to small towns along the corridor, as well as vital access to the residents of those communities.

- Establish customized transportation system policies and expectations for rural Washington that acknowledges and accommodates the unique challenges and needs small cities and less-populated areas of our state face.

- Consider providing regional transportation planning organizations a portion of funding directly, to fund regional transportation needs, with a periodic report back to the Legislature on investments and outcomes.
Transportation Equity Is Central to Achieving Free & Accessible Movement for All

Transportation should enable personal freedom, access, and connection. However, lingering effects of our country’s past still impact our marginalized communities today, including increased exposure to pollution, higher rates of injuries, limited to no access to safe transportation infrastructure and reliable transit, and long commutes to reach jobs and services. Additionally, during the pandemic, people of color have been significantly impacted due to disproportionate numbers who are lower-wage, essential workers who cannot telecommute. And transportation-related pollution exposure has created disproportionate fatality rates.

Actions

• In order to understand where the biggest transportation inequities exist, the collection of disaggregated data by race, income, gender, and background should begin.
• Use environmental health-related disparities data from the Department of Health to gain new insights into where public transportation investments can be prioritized to buffer environmental health impacts on Washington’s communities.
• Proactively and consistently engage Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, low-income communities, and people with disabilities in transportation decision making.
• Develop and use an equity analysis toolkit for use in evaluating the benefits and impacts of transportation policies and investments to ensure better outcomes for historically marginalized populations in Washington. For example, racial equity tools provide a structure for institutionalizing the consideration of racial equity by identifying clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes and develops strategies to mitigate unintended negative consequences.
• Ensure state policies support all people feeling safe using the system.
• Assess how policies around fines, fees, and enforcement impact low-income and BIPOC communities.

Proactively plan for the emerging Cascadia Mega-Region Encompassing Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, B.C.

While planning is an ongoing effort at the state, regional, and local level, actions are typically not proactive. As a result, urban areas tend to react to growth as it happens. Furthermore, little planning is in place to address the cross-state and cross-border mega-region emerging between Vancouver B.C. and Portland, Oregon. History tells us that if we don’t have effective planning and proactive action, we end up with negative consequences that are difficult to reverse, including worsened climate impacts, increased congestion, and broadening sprawl.

Actions

• Take action today to advance the bold policy recommendations in the Cascadia Innovation Corridor’s Vision 2050 report. These recommendations focus on a path forward that leverage high-speed rail transit to connect our existing urban centers to expanded hub cities with good jobs, affordable housing, and world-class culture. The result is reduced emissions, and the creation of flexibility and affordability which are key to our future success.
• As a first step, the Legislature should establish a multi-jurisdictional structure/entity through which plans can be developed and advanced to enable proactive and coordinated investments and actions in the near-term. Doing so will support the creation of the mega-region we want, rather than waiting to see what we get.
The Transportation Commission proposes policies to further a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation system for our state

The Commission is directed in law to provide the Governor and the Legislature policy guidance in key issue areas, including:

- Transportation finance;
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system;
- Transportation infrastructure needs;
- Best practices for adoption and use by transportation related agencies and programs;
- Efficiencies that will improve service delivery and/or coordination;

This section of our annual report provides specific policy guidance and recommendations for the Governor and Legislature on the topics identified by RCW 47.01.075. We offer four core recommendations, and several additional priority areas we continue to recommend action on.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Significantly increase funding for preservation and maintenance

The Commission has consistently recommended an increase in current preservation and maintenance funding levels. While recent investments have helped address some of the need, we continue to fall short of the needed funding to help our state address the ever-growing maintenance and preservation backlog.

The Commission has heard from many stakeholders, partner agencies, and local jurisdictions as it holds its local meetings around the state each year and the number one priority expressed is that jurisdictions are struggling to meet maintenance and preservation needs. This fact was highlighted in the Joint Transportation Committee’s Needs Assessment study conducted in 2020, concluding the state must prioritize maintenance and preservation, stating “insufficient investment in maintenance and preservation increases costs by requiring funding of full replacement of facilities that could have been rehabilitated at much less expense.”

Recommendation 2: Establish a sustainable, long-term funding source for transportation and streamline our current funding structure

Over time, the state’s funding structure for transportation has become very complex as new fees and taxes have been implemented to generate much needed revenues to fund transportation programs and services. The result is a multifaceted funding structure that is hard to explain, even harder to understand, and reduces transparency and public confidence in how revenues are used. As the gas tax weakens over time with an ever-accelerating growth in vehicle fuel efficiency and EV adoption, the first big structural change before us will be to transition to a Road Usage Charge (RUC) as a replacement to the gas tax. The transition to a RUC will need to be phased in over time, so it is imperative the Legislature authorize a small-scale RUC program per the Commission’s 2020 recommendations, as soon as possible.

While a shift to RUC will address the funding needs for our roads and bridges long-term, our multi-modal transportation system has never recovered from the financial blow it suffered when the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) was repealed in 2000. The time has come to determine how we can fund non-highway related needs and create a more simplistic funding structure in the process. The idea would be to streamline and replace some existing fees, with fewer and more productive revenue sources, with the added benefit of increasing transparency and understanding of our transportation tax structure.

1Joint Transportation Committee Needs Assessment Presentation
December 17, 2020
To achieve this, a streamlined funding structure needs to be established that is sustainable and supported by a small number of revenue sources that generate significant revenues and have clear dedications of use in law. We suggest consideration of the following hallmark sources:

1. **RUC** would replace the gas tax to fund highways and bridges. Doing so increases equity and fairness by ensuring drivers pay their fair share for road usage, regardless of their vehicle’s fuel efficiency and creating the ability to offer per mile discounts based upon income.

2. Establish a “Transportation Improvement Fee” (TIF) to fund multi-modal needs. The TIF would be based upon the value of a vehicle and could replace various current vehicle licensing fees. The TIF provides greater equity and fairness and is much less regressive than the flat smaller fee’s currently assessed. It would generate significantly more revenue as compared to the many small fees vehicle owners pay today. The Commission’s 2015 Revenue Proposal recommended a fee of 1.5% of a vehicle’s value (based upon the current enacted depreciation schedule in use), assessed one year after purchase. This approach would increase equity and fairness, would generate more than $500 million per fiscal year in flexible funding for the transportation system.

**Recommendation 3: Make needed transportation investments to enable and fully implement our state’s environmental, social justice, and equity priorities**

Transportation is both impacted by climate change and is also a significant contributor to it. On the contribution side, in 2018, nearly 45% of the state’s carbon emissions, resulted from transportation, with emissions from on-road gasoline personal cars and trucks contributing over half of this. On the impact side, our infrastructure is showing the effects of climate change, from wildfires to flooding. Extreme heat can cause road buckling and freeze-thaw cycles cause pavement cracking and potholes. All of this combined, adds materially to the costs of infrastructure design, repair, and retrofit, as well as decreasing reliability for users of the system.

The 2021 state Climate Commitment Act was enacted, establishing a comprehensive program to reduce carbon pollution and achieve the greenhouse gas limits set in state law, with preparations underway to implement the program by January 1, 2023. By capping and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the state’s largest emitting sources and industries, and putting environmental justice and equity at the center of climate policy, our state is on the cusp of making historical improvements that will address climate change impacts.

As the Legislature invests in these new commitments, it is important that the Legislature also move forward transportation policies that further incentivize the reduction of emissions, and make investments that address direct climate impacts to our transportation infrastructure, such as landslide prevention, flood prevention, bridge structure enhancements to manage river flooding/ increased flows, etc.

**Recommendation 4: Address general aviation airport needs**

Airports are an important part of our economy and our transportation system, moving people and freight. Major airports with significant commercial traffic receive user fees and dedicated federal funding. But many smaller commercial service and general aviation (GA) airports with little or no commercial traffic are often underfunded. These airports serve smaller communities and are an important resource for resiliency. They provide access for first responders and emergency supplies and services, are a critical link to driving their economies, and serve as important connections to other communities across the state and country.

The following recommendations are aimed at addressing the challenges and supporting our state’s small commercial service and GA airports, to help them prepare for the future of aviation and support their ability to adapt to transformational shifts in how we have considered traditional air transportation, including electric aircraft and unmanned aircraft.

**Create a rural air service development & restoration program**

Air service is essential to community vitality, attracting business, supporting economic development, and creating jobs. Air service to smaller markets around the state is vulnerable to commercial service reductions and elimination. To help counter this and sustain critical commercial air service to our smaller communities around...
the state, the Legislature should consider establishing an Air Service Development and Restoration Program to support small community aviation service needs across the state. Similar to the USDOT’s “Small Community Air Service Development Program” (SCASDP), this program could be grant-based, providing applicants the opportunity to self-identify their air service deficiencies and propose an appropriate solution.

The Department of Revenue has submitted a plan to the FAA detailing how they will ensure these aviation fuel tax revenues are used for airport purposes. While the Department of Revenue awaits a determination from the FAA, steps can be made to bring the state into compliance. The Legislature is urged to pass SB 5329 concerning the distribution of aircraft fuel tax revenue, which does not fully address the compliance issue but demonstrates to the FAA movement in that direction, and prevents airports from further financial harm.

ADDITIONAL PRIORITY AREAS

Improve Transportation Safety

Washington is a “Target Zero” state, meaning we have a stated goal of zero traffic fatalities and injuries. The execution of Washington’s Target Zero strategic plan has been historically successful at reducing the number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries over the years.

However, the COVID-19 Pandemic put a pause on our progress. While Americans drove less in 2020, an estimated 38,680 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes – the largest increase since 2007, representing an increase of about 7.2 percent compared to 2019. The largest increases in 2020, as compared to 2019, included non-Hispanic Black people, up 23%. And pedestrian fatalities also went up in 2020. Analysis of data reported by State Highway Safety Offices (SHSOs) projects that 6,721 pedestrians were killed on U.S. roads in 2020, up 4.8% from 6,412 fatalities in 2019.

This trend has carried over to 2021. In the fall of 2021 NHTSA released new fatality numbers indicating 8,730 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in the first three months of 2021 – a 10.5% increase from the first quarter of 2020.

The federal data suggests the driving patterns and behavioral changes seen in 2020 are continuing the trend in the wrong direction, with drivers engaged in risky behavior, including speeding, failing to wear seatbelts, and driving under the influence. To aid in evaluating trends and identifying effective solutions, NHTSA released Countermeasures that Work which supports a proactive, equitable and safe approach to eliminating fatalities on our roads, addressing the safety needs of all road users, including those who walk, bike and drive. The Legislature is urged to support the activities related to the implementation of the federal guidance.

Washington State’s program could alternatively take the approach of the “JobsOhio Air Service Restoration program” established in 2020. Funded at up to $10 million per fiscal year, this program provides commercial service airports the opportunity to work collaboratively through public and private partnerships to retain and restore air service opportunities for economic development. The program was established to assist business attraction and retention efforts across the state by providing support for air service in qualifying markets where airlines have canceled or are planning to cancel service.

Address diversion of aviation fuel tax revenues

In 2012, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) notified the state of its non-compliance with federal policy regarding taxes on aviation fuel, which are considered to be airport revenue and subject to revenue-use requirements. Per FAA policy and procedures concerning the use of airport revenues, state and local taxes imposed after December 30, 1987 on aviation fuel, must be used exclusively for airport purposes and aviation programs. Currently the local sales and use tax on aviation fuel, the Hazardous Substance Tax, and the Petroleum Products tax are not in compliance with federal policy.

Anacortes airport

3US Department Of Transportation web page: July 27, 2021; Small Community Air Service Development Program - USDOT SCASDP.
4JobsOhio Commercial Air Service Restoration
7National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web Page: September 2, 2021; 2021 Fatality Estimates Data - NHTSA
**Multimodal Transportation Brings Efficiency Opportunities**

No single change in how transportation infrastructure is planned, built, and operated will result in significantly reducing costs or improving travel options. However, there are tools and approaches that if used together, may result in meaningful increases in efficiency, reduction in costs, and improvement in the productivity of our transportation system.

**Make HOV travel easy and attractive**

It is important to continue making investments in building a seamless and efficient HOV system on our freeways with the goal of increasing carpooling, relieving congestion, and creating greater travel time reliability for transit. To further support this, expanded capacity and access to park and ride facilities will be critical to addressing pent-up demand and enable drivers to utilize transit for a larger portion of their commute. By proactively creating a system of satellite park and ride facilities on the outskirts of the central Puget Sound, that allows transit providers (public and private) to co-invest with the state so they too can use these facilities, we increase access and effectively reduce congestion.

But expanding park and ride infrastructure alone, is not enough. We must increase access, predictability and on-site service provisions including: the ability to reserve a parking space for a nominal fee; providing adequate charging infrastructure for EV’s; coordinating seamless intermodal connections that are provided by the state and private sector; and enabling collocation of key business services on-site. Together these elements create a user experience that brings multiple benefits to drivers and helps accelerate HOV travel.

**Establishing a statewide policy and regulatory structure for rideshare services**

Ride-share services play an important role in our ongoing effort to reduce congestion, reduce emissions, and provide suburban and rural residents travel options where transit services are minimal or non-existent. A statewide regulatory structure is needed in order to achieve consistency of ride-share operations statewide, and to enable not only ride-share services in rural/under-served parts of the state, but to also create the opportunity for active coordination with transit providers to enhance access and address “last-mile” challenges.

**Expand cross-state passenger rail service**

Multimodal transportation requires ongoing investments aimed at continually expanding services and options statewide. To achieve climate priorities and goals, the state needs to actively pursue enhanced multimodal travel across the state. Reliable and efficient passenger rail service could address this need, based upon further detailed assessment. To make this travel option more attractive, service should be structured around a triangular route that runs between Seattle, Moses Lake, Spokane, and the Tri-Cities, with a keen eye to consideration around last-mile connections at each destination.

Having reliable and efficient intra-state passenger rail service will enable more drivers to use a service that is both cost-effective and beneficial to the climate, as compared to current vehicular or air travel powered by fossil fuels. Given the priorities of the current federal funding program, now is the time for Washington State to actively pursue the assessment, design and funding of a long-term passenger rail service expansion program, including high-speed rail, that connects our entire state and supports regional economic growth and our tourism industry.

**Phase-out the use of studded snow tires on public roadways**

The Commission recommends the Legislature prohibit the sale of studded tires and phase out their use within five years after they are no longer sold. Studded tires are estimated to cause $23 to $33 million in damage to Washington’s highways annually, and that does not include damage to local streets and roads. More than a dozen states have banned tires with metal studs. Studies show all weather tires perform better than studded tires in the vast majority of winter driving conditions because they have better contact with the road surface, except when driving on solid ice. The current $5 fee established in 2016 on the sale of every studded tire in Washington, covers only a small fraction of the costs in damage they cause to the public roads and highways.

**Systematically Address Workforce Development & Retention**

As the state faces worker shortages and retention challenges, the Legislature is encouraged to support wage increases to attract and retain a diverse workforce and increase training and development opportunities. Also, enabling state transportation agencies to expand recruitment efforts and approaches beyond traditional state processes is important to ensuring women, minorities, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals are aware of employment opportunities, as well as training and apprenticeship opportunities and programs.
The Legislature established Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in part, to build consensus on transportation priorities that address the unique needs in each region of the state. By law and for efficiency, RTPOs in urban areas are integrated with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to carry out federal planning requirements and disburse federal funds. This section provides information, as provided by the 18 RTPOs/ MPOs, on their activities and challenges.

For the second consecutive year, nearly all the RTPOs/MPOs highlighted funding sustainability and maintenance/preservation funding needs as their top challenges.

Snapshot of Regional Priorities

The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCG) serves as the MPO and RTPO for the Benton-Franklin region encompassing the Tri-Cities Urbanized Area, a federally designated Transportation Management Area, and the cities within Benton and Franklin Counties, as well as the area of Burbank in Walla Walla County.

Regional Activities:
- BFCG is the update of their Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) (RegionalVision2045). The MTP is a long-range and multi-modal planning document that will identify the transportation needs of the region through 2045.
- BFCG updated its Tri-Cities Bicycle Map with new bicycle and pedestrian information provided by local jurisdictions, illustrating the region’s shared use pathways, bicycle lanes, and bicycle routes. The map has been published in both English and Spanish.
- BFCG is currently collecting regional traffic counts at over 620 different locations throughout the Benton-Franklin region. These regional traffic counts provide jurisdictions with updated data for all of the roads within their jurisdiction and the entire region.

Facing Challenges:
- The Benton-Franklin area is experiencing one of the highest growth rates in the country. This is a major challenge for the area as it works to accommodate growth while maintaining quality of life. The Benton-Franklin area is battling maintaining the existing infrastructure, while building out the current and future network to accommodate future growth.

The Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council (CDTC) is the MPO and RTPO for a large region of diverse small cities and rural areas, with the Wenatchee/East Wenatchee urban area at its center. With an economy based on agriculture and tourism, the region depends heavily on access to I-90, US 97, and US 2 mountain passes to access the Puget Sound region and its ports.

Regional Activities:
- Regional collaboration resulted in a 2021 federal INFRA grant award to the City of Wenatchee of $92.4 million to advance CDTC’s top transportation priority, the Apple Capital Loop project. However, a funding gap remains.
- CDTC completed a strategic multi-modal plan to improve safety, access, and mobility on the US 2 highway corridor between Lake Wenatchee and City of Cashmere, with a focus on tourism-related transportation challenges in and around the City of Leavenworth.

Facing Challenges:
- An additional $120 million is needed to fully fund the Apple Capital Loop project and state funding could help close this gap.
- Located 46 miles from I-90, the Wenatchee Valley one of only eight metropolitan areas in the nation without a four-lane state highway connection to the Interstate Highway System.
- With daily commercial air service connections to SeaTac Airport, the region is actively seeking to expand direct connections to additional airports.
- The CDTC is working to achieve consensus with WSDOT on a transportation vision for the region that addresses population and economic growth during a time of uncertainty over state funding and policy priorities for maintaining, modernizing, and expanding the transportation system.
Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization (IRTP0), formed in 2016, serves as a public forum to identify, discuss, study, and bring into focus regional transportation challenges and opportunities for Island County.

Regional Activities:
- In 2021, the IRTPO Executive Board adopted a formal Island Vehicle Electrification Policy. Many members are currently working with grantors and consultants to move toward more electrification opportunities in Island County. The policy is based on the Island Vehicle Electrification Study conducted in 2020.
- A region-wide data collection project, begun in 2020, resulted in a database of standard traffic counts and collision data, as well as origin/destination, freight intensity, ferry ridership, alternate mode use, etc.
- As the Port of South Whidbey works toward re-construction of the damaged passenger ferry dock at Clinton, IRTPO is looking for opportunities to bring in an all-electric passenger-only ferry from Clinton to Everett.

Facing Challenges:
- As a region, one of the most significant challenges continues to be maintaining access to and from the islands. Whidbey Island, with only one land-based access point to the mainland, is substantially ferry-dependent. Combining service reductions with the high volume of freight minimizes opportunities for both commuter and tourist travel. The financial sustainability of Washington State Ferries is vital to Naval Air Station Whidbey, an IRTPO member, and to the Island region.
- Island Transit is seeking funding to build a green transit facility – The South Whidbey Transit Center. The state-of-the-art facility will make it possible for Island Transit to move closer to its goal of operating a zero emissions fleet, while providing equitable access to transportation, including ferries.

The Lewis-Clark Valley MPO (LCVMPO) is a bi-state MPO that provides regional transportation planning for the City of Lewiston and Nez Perce County in Idaho, and the City of Clarkston, the City of Asotin, and the urban area of Asotin County in Washington.

Regional Activities:
- The LCVMPO’s Long-Range Transportation plan was completed in FY2021. This was the first plan completed in-house and features corridors within the region, and high-level solutions designed to achieve regional goals and also support state safety and preservation targets.
- The LCVMPO has been monitoring the criteria used in the 2020 Census, particularly the change in qualifying urbanized areas (UZAs) from a people per square mile density to household units per square mile density and essentially doubling what has been required since the 2000 Census.

Facing Challenges:
- Proposals to breach the four lower Snake River dams, which would limit water flow and reduce operating pools, thereby limiting water navigation.
- There are multiple large projects (the Clearwater Memorial Bridge Rebuild, Clarkston’s Intersection at 2nd, Diagonal and Bridge Streets, and the Interstate Bridge Painting), overlapping in both Washington and Idaho on the regional network, that will disrupt traffic flows and cause delays.

Northeast Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NEW RTPO) is part of the Tri-County Economic Development District covering Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties.

Regional Activities:
- The Kettle Falls-Colville Trail Action Plan was completed through a technical assistance grant from the National Park Services Rivers, Trails, and Conservations Assistance Program. The plan provides a framework to develop a non-motorized trail connecting the communities of Kettle Falls and Colville.
- The NEW RTPO completed a comprehensive update to the Regional Transportation Plan.
- The Astor Street Project in Colville was completed, which has traffic calming features that will help the City of Colville continue to make its downtown more pedestrian friendly.
Facing Challenges:
- Continued funding is needed for the preservation and maintenance of existing roads.
- The lack of broadband service across the region remains an issue. Lack of broadband and cell service in the region greatly limits information technologies that would inform and assist customers who would use the transit system in northeast Washington. Without the ability to stay connected it nearly impossible to provide any real time information on bus schedules and routes. Also, without access to the internet, information available online becomes much harder to use. In addition, the lack of broadband and cell service can also negatively affect freight movement and emergency services (wildland fire for example).
- The region continues to face challenges with improved regional public transportation access, expansion of services, and additional funding opportunities.

The Okanogan Council of Governments (OCOG) is a forum for regional collaboration and coordination for its eighteen members. It serves a highly rural region with an international border crossing, agricultural and tourism sectors, and vast forests and wildlands.

Regional Activities:
- OCOG completed Phase 2 of its Backroads Study, to establish a coordinated network of primitive and backcountry roads owned and maintained by various jurisdictions. Such a network will increase the region’s ability to respond to and recover from natural disasters – a priority for this rural region.
- There are good working partnerships between local agencies and between local and state agencies. Innovative approaches to project coordination and cooperation between agencies help blunt the impact of scarce resources at the local and state levels.

Facing Challenges:
- OCOG continues to advocate for a more equitable base-level of funding to support important regional planning efforts for all regions in the state, away from a population-based approach which penalizes more rural regions.
- Available revenues for local, tribal, and transit system preservation is inadequate to meet the backlog of need, much less address basic system improvements to enhance safe mobility for all modes of travel.
- OCOG has prioritized the Backroads Study as a public safety need but can no longer use its budget for this due to competing needs for regional planning support. Additional funding support from state and federal land management agencies would expedite study completion and accelerate the region’s preparedness for future events.
- WSDOT’s North Central Region needs funding to reconstruct bridges on the State Route 153 corridor, a vital lifeline and essential evacuation route for the Methow Valley and those crossing over the Washington Pass scenic byway into north central Washington from western Washington.

Palouse Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO) provides regional transportation planning services for 20 rural and urban towns, four counties, four ports, and five transit agencies within Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman County.

Regional Activities:
- Updated the “Palouse Regional Active Transportation Plan,” evaluating the current active transportation network to improve the regional connectivity, safety, policy framework, and funding decisions.
- Concluded the fifth year of the Palouse Driver Safety Campaign, a public awareness campaign to reduce serious and fatal crashes on the Palouse for distracted, drowsy, and young drivers, focused on the Washington State University community. The campaign implemented non-engineering solutions to reduce crashes.
- Six passing lanes were constructed on US 195.

Facing Challenges:
- Additional funding is needed for maintenance and preservation of paved surfaces, the region’s freight rail capabilities, and preserving the inland waterways as a viable transportation conduit to keep the commodities produced within the region flowing.
- Priority projects include those that improve regional safety and mobility and reduce traffic congestion by implementing various intersection improvement projects, traffic studies, widening Pullman airport roadway and more.
Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO) serves the Olympic and Kitsap Peninsulas and includes four counties, nine cities, four transit agencies, four port districts, and nine Indian tribes, as well as the WSDOT Olympic Region.

Regional Activities:
- PRTPO established an online electric vehicle (EV) information portal and convened a diverse stakeholder group to support coordination activities aimed at expanding the availability of EV charging infrastructure throughout the Olympic and Kitsap Peninsulas.
- PRTPO hosted a comprehensive half-day training session for local agency staff who use federal highway funds on their projects and invited agencies from surrounding regions to attend, providing federal project management education to 45 local staff.
- PRTPO’s Consolidated Grants funding priorities were successful in statewide competition and resulted in the launch of a new coordinated services program supporting workforce job access in Mason County in addition to extending other established services elsewhere in the region.

Facing Challenges:
- More than half of all ferry trips in the state begin or end in the Peninsula region. Inadequate funding for state ferry vessel replacement and maintenance creates service disruptions that impact travelers and local economies.
- State highways, bridges, and ferries are the backbone of the PRTPO’s rural transportation system. Inadequate funding for the necessary maintenance and preservation of these essential facilities continues, creating disruptions to the region’s communities and rural economies.
- Statewide funding formulas tend to prioritize the funding of urban projects. When allocations for any new funding package are established, funding for rural needs and capacities should be formulated differently than they have been.

Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is the MPO and RTPO for King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties. Over the past decade, the region has been one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country.

Regional Activities:
- PSRC began work on a Regional Equity Strategy that will provide guidance to member agencies and PSRC staff, with the goal of improving outcomes for marginalized communities and providing opportunity for all residents. This includes a guidebook for engaging communities in the development of transportation plans, policies, and projects; development of an equity dashboard to monitor progress on a variety of measures; and formation of a regional Equity Advisory Committee to advise on PSRC’s work program.
- PSRC developed a draft Regional Housing Strategy identifying regional and local actions to preserve, improve, and expand housing options in the region. The goal is to make available a range of affordable, accessible, healthy, and safe housing choices to every resident. The strategy will help guide and support local comprehensive plan updates.
- With three COVID stimulus packages passed since March of 2020, PSRC has distributed a total of $2 billion in transit funding to support the region’s transit agencies during the public health crisis over the last 17 months. Transit agencies have been working together to ensure critical services are being provided safely, as well as planning for recovery and a return to service.

Facing Challenges:
- Given current COVID conditions and a new paradigm for remote work environments, challenges remain for the region’s transit agencies as they encourage residents to return to transit safely and continue on the path towards recovery.
- Offices and businesses around the region continue to grapple with the reality of this new paradigm and many organizations are working towards a hybrid work environment for their employees.
- With the work of the Regional Housing Strategy underway, the region continues to face rising housing costs and homelessness. The planning and development of more affordable housing options is a key issue across the region that all agencies are addressing.
Quad County RTPO (QUADCO) provides regional transportation planning and implementation within the region of Adams, Grant, Kittitas, and Lincoln Counties.

Regional Activities:
- QUADCO conducted an evaluation of Growth Management Act (GMA) transportation elements in Grant and Kittitas Counties. These are the only two counties within the QUADCO where the GMA is applicable.
- Sections of QUADCO bylaws and interlocal agreements were updated to increase tribal inclusion.
- Projects and/or studies to improve safety through engineering, improve Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, and mitigate environmental impacts were completed.

Facing Challenges:
- A priority for this agricultural hub is state-funded rehabilitation of the rail lines for the Port of Moses Lake, the Port of Warden, and the Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad.

Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) is the MPO and RTPO in Skagit County. SCOG works cooperatively with local governments, WSDOT, Skagit Transit, tribes, and other stakeholders to plan for all modes of transportation.

Regional Activities:
- A new long-range transportation plan was adopted in early 2021.
- Safety improvements to the North 4th Street and Riverside Drive railroad crossing was completed.

Facing Challenges:
- The biggest challenge facing the region is identifying funding for the operations, maintenance, and preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Securing funding and implementing necessary fish passage barrier projects lead by WSDOT.

The Southwest Washington RTPO is comprised of five counties: Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, and Wahkiakum.

Regional Activities:
- Two regionally significant projects were completed in the Longview-Kelso urban area: 1) West Main Street Realignment Final Phase in Kelso; and 2) An extension of Beech Street in Longview providing access to more than 40 acres for new industrial/commercial development.
- Launched a new regional mobility management program to coordinate resources and improve the availability and accessibility of transportation services for the disabled, low income, seniors, and others.
• Twin Transit’s e-Transit station at the Mellen Street Park & Ride in Centralia opened. The station includes wave induction charging technology for electric buses, two EV chargers, and infrastructure for more chargers in the future.
• SR 4 pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements in Cathlamet are on track to be operationally complete in 2021.
• The Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Grade Separation Project continues its momentum with initial design, early acquisition of Right of Way, and project phase development.

Facing Challenges:
• The biggest challenge continues to be securing sufficient funding for maintenance and preservation.
• Among the most pressing issues is acquiring supplemental funding to complete the Connecting Washington Industrial Way/Oregon Way Interchange project.
• Small communities continue to struggle with projects that include federal funding and the additional regulatory and cost burdens associated with these funds.
• Identifying funding to analyze the replacement of the aging, and functionally obsolete, Lewis & Clark Bridge and build awareness of the challenges of the 90-year-old facility spanning the Columbia River.

Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) is the MPO and RTPO for Spokane County and is a federally designated Transportation Management Area.

Regional Activities:
• In response to changing growth and development, SRTC is providing regional coordination and project management on the following efforts and projects:
  ○ US 195/I-90 area improvements: This study addresses existing and future challenges to safety, operations, access, and infrastructure in a growing area with limited local transportation connectivity.
  ○ Division Connects: This effort identified a preferred alternative for bus rapid transit service connecting communities and businesses along the Division Street corridor and is further evaluating transit supportive land uses and active transportation opportunities.
  ○ Community demographics and equity research: SRTC staff is assessing various community demographics to identify needs and barriers to mobility and plan to develop a framework for equity planning and engagement.
• SRTC and local partners were awarded a $2.5 million grant from the Department of Commerce for the installation of EV charging equipment at 51 sites throughout the region.
• SRTC is entering phase two of the Data Application Transportation Analysis (DATA) project to provide updated data to assist with transportation decision-making and investment.

Facing Challenges:
• Funding for the maintenance and preservation of the transportation system continues to be a challenge. A recent financial analysis indicates a $4 billion shortfall in maintenance and preservation funding, over a 23-year period.
• The Spokane region is experiencing significant housing demand and affordability challenges related to regional growth in both Spokane County and in Northern Idaho. SRTC continues to be challenged with shifting transportation patterns and increasing congestion that results from growth.
• The Spokane area has a greater proportion of people with low incomes and people living with disabilities, than both the state and the nation. SRTC is challenged with identifying and addressing the disparate benefits and impacts of the transportation system on these communities.
**Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)** is a single-county MPO and RTPO for the Thurston County region, provides regional transportation planning for one of the fastest growing regions in the state.

**Regional Activities:**
- TRPC continued to support a Planning and Environmental Linkages study (PEL) by conducting transportation modeling of actions to improve I-5 congestion from Tumwater to Mounts Road in Thurston and Pierce Counties. I-5 Tumwater to Mounts Road project is TRPC’s highest transportation priority.
- TRPC is halfway through a project looking at ways to reduce the Capitol Campus’ traffic impacts by greatly increasing employee telework, staggering schedules, and using other transportation demand management strategies.
- TRPC completed its first update and expansion of its “State of Our Transportation System” data series. After developing data for pavement condition, bridge condition, and fish passage barriers in the first series, TRPC added data on sidewalk network completeness, electric vehicle charging stations, and safety.

**Facing Challenges:**
- Working with the Nisqually Indian Tribe, WSDOT, and others, TRPC continues to seek funding for next steps in the I-5 Tumwater to Mounts Road project. In addition to congestion, concerns include significant flood risk and degradation of salmon habitat in the Nisqually Delta area, a national wildlife refuge.
- With most Capitol Campus state workers teleworking throughout COVID response, the transportation system around the Capitol, including the chronically congested I-5 and US 101 interchange, has functioned much better. The challenge going forward is to maintain teleworking at levels that result in meaningful reductions in vehicle miles traveled.
- At all levels of government, the needs for transportation network maintenance and preservation far outstrips available budgets. In the Thurston Region, they found that for pavement preservation alone, the region is investing annually less than half of what is needed to maintain current pavement condition. This is an issue that cannot continue to be deferred, as it risks safety, economic viability, and the effectiveness of the tremendous transportation investments already made.

**The Walla Walla MPO and Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization (WWVMO/SRTPO)** is responsible for coordinating transportation investments in northeastern Walla Walla County, Washington, Umatilla County, Oregon, and the cities within.

**Regional Activities:**
- In February, the Metropolitan and Regional Transportation - 2045 Plan was adopted, setting a new framework for future mobility investments.
- The region’s worst intersection, SR 125/Plaza Way, has been reconstructed into a roundabout, improving throughput and safety. Completed in the summer of 2021, this project has piloted new safety features for visually impaired users. These new safety features exceed legal requirements.
- The region’s completion of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors’ Walkability Virtual Academy program resulted in a three-year action plan to improve walkability and movability in the Walla Walla Valley.

**Facing Challenges:**
- Establishing a strong bicycle and pedestrian network in a piecemeal fashion is not enough to encourage modal shifts or create safe environments for all users. Increased investments in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure are needed in order to catch up.
- Traffic safety continues to be a concern. The 2045 Plan revealed that 30% of regional crashes are due to distraction or inattention, adding even greater risk to work zone crews, pedestrians, and cyclists.
- Maintenance and preservation activities do not have the funds to sustain existing infrastructure in a state of good repair. As the region’s roads and bridges age, more resources will be required to maintain the transportation system.
The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) is the MPO for the Bellingham urbanized area and the RTPO for Whatcom County.

Regional Activities:
- WCOG’s International Mobility and Trade Corridor (IMTC) Program continues to coordinate planning and operations among the multiple U.S. and Canadian agencies responsible for the land-border transportation systems that connect these integrated economies.
- Nearly 22,000 people participate in Whatcom Smart Trips, WCOG’s nationally recognized transportation demand management program. Smart Trips participants use on-line or paper trip diaries to track walking, bicycling, ridesharing, and riding the bus, helping to increase awareness of travel mode choices.

Facing Challenges:
- The ongoing shortage of state funding for maintenance and preservation of Whatcom’s surface transportation network is the greatest challenge facing the region.
- Investments are needed to support transit electrification to enable the Whatcom Transportation Authority to move to an all-electric fleet over the next decade.
- Bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements are needed along Marine Drive, which runs from the City of Bellingham to the Lummi Nation in unincorporated Whatcom County.
- A new roundabout at the intersection of Meridian Street and Birchwood Avenue in Bellingham is needed to improve freight capacity, facilitate high-capacity bus transit service, and address bicycle and pedestrian safety concerns.
- Improvements are needed to State Route 548 in Blaine to address significant traffic delays caused by the federally required inspection of rail freight cars entering the US from Canada via Whatcom County. These delays impact emergency response, delay school buses and inhibit economic development.

The Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG) is the MPO for the Greater Yakima metropolitan area and the RTPO for Yakima County. YVCOG expanded its Metropolitan Planning Area boundary to cover the entire county in the fall of 2020.

Regional Activities:
- YVCOG conducted more than 330 traffic counts for all of the region’s municipal governments. This program will greatly improve the 2021 Countywide Traffic Model Update and provide jurisdictions with year-to-year traffic data for the first time ever, including the impacts of the COVID pandemic on city road systems.
- Regionally significant projects throughout Yakima County are gaining momentum, including Yakima County’s construction of Phase I of the East-West Corridor and completing Union Gap’s South Union Gap Interchange, allowing city efforts to shift to completing the Union Gap Beltway Project. The City of Zillah’s transformative Vintage Valley Parkway project completed its 2-year construction.
- Since spring 2019, YVCOG, WSDOT, Yakima County, local municipalities, agencies, and the National Park Service have provided planning support to the Yakama Nation-led Heritage Connectivity Trail Project, planned to create scores of miles of multimodal trails within the Nation and linking to communities and trail systems beyond its boundaries. In July 2021, the Yakama Nation Tribal Council approved the Yakama Nation Heritage Connectivity Concept Plan, authorizing the obtaining of funding and construction activities.

Facing Challenges:
- The area will experience major traffic route disruptions resulting from the multi-year construction replacing several intersections with roundabouts along SR 97.
- The roads in and near the Yakama Nation experience some of the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the state. To improve safety and reduce these rates, many entities (The Yakama Nation, National Park Service, YVCOG, WSDOT, Yakima County, and valley cities) must work together to address bicycle/pedestrian safety, including the consideration of other multi-modal options such as improved transit access and passenger rail services.
- Funding of system maintenance and preservation continue to stress local transportation budgets while at the same time making jurisdictional investment into much needed transportation capacity and system expansion efforts more difficult to compete for at a time of reducing federal and state funding. While state systems are transitioning to a primarily maintenance and preservation strategy, local jurisdictions continue to struggle to meet long planned and needed system expansion to keep their communities viable and competitive with larger urban centers.
- Equity, in many forms, is an ongoing concern in the Yakima Valley. YVCOG continues to advocate for more equitable funding program opportunities. YVCOG will continue to develop equity in project selection, planning, and improved public outreach and participation.
Overview of 2021 Work and Activities

This section provides an overview of the major work efforts the Commission undertook in 2021. It also serves as the required annual reporting to the Legislature on changes made to toll rates, pursuant to RCW 47.56.855. Further details on tolling and recommendations can be found in the Commission’s annual Tolling Report.

Tolling and Ferry Fare Actions

Latest projections anticipate tolls and ferry fares to generate over $791 million during the 2021-2023 biennium. Beginning in March 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic sharply reduced traffic and ridership and related revenues. Into 2021, toll traffic and revenues continued to lag pre-COVID levels, but are recovering to varying degrees depending on the facility.

Ferry ridership and revenues also continued to lag pre-COVID levels in 2021, with recovery at a slower rate than for tolling, particularly for walk-on passenger ridership. Long-term, questions remain about whether some changes to work and commute patterns will become more permanent such as teleworking, shared workspaces, and reduced transit use. Despite the decline in tolling and ferry fare revenues brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, they remain a significant portion of the state’s transportation budget, raising revenue for major capital improvements and system operations, and improving traffic flow on key corridors.

To meet financial requirements, in 2021 the Commission adjusted toll rates for the SR 99 tunnel and Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), effective October 1, 2021, and made toll rate changes for the SR 520 Bridge which will not take effect until July 1, 2023. Until then, the current toll rate schedule remains in effect. The Commission also adjusted passenger and vehicle ferry fares effective October 1st of 2021 and 2022. When revising or establishing toll rates and ferry fares, the Commission carefully reviews traffic and revenue projections, considers legal obligations, and listens to affected members of impacted communities.

SR 520 Floating Bridge

Rate Setting: In August 2021, the Commission adopted a tailored toll rate increase by time period, averaging 15% overall, effective July 1, 2023. Until this time, the current toll rate schedule remains in effect. Under the changes effective in 2023, overnight rates (11 p.m. - 5 a.m.) remain the same while weekday peak hour times are extended by one hour, resulting in a $1.10 increase from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Rate increases for other times of day, including the weekends, range from 20 cents to 55 cents.

The current SR 520 Bridge opened for traffic in 2016, replacing the four-lane bridge that opened in 1967. Tolls are expected to contribute $1.2 billion toward its construction cost over 39 years, and also help improve traffic flow. Rates vary by day of week and time of day to maximize revenue and vehicle throughput and minimize diversion to other routes.

The pandemic has resulted in a significant decline in traffic and toll revenues for the SR 520 Bridge. In the short-term, the 2021 Legislature provided funding to address financial requirements eliminating the need to increase toll rates in 2021. However, forecasts project revenue shortfalls in the future as the region continues to recover from the pandemic. In order to meet legal requirements and bond contracts, the Commission needed to update the financial plan for the SR 520 Bridge to incorporate a rate increase effective on July 1, 2023 (FY 2024). If traffic rebounds faster than anticipated, the Commission may adjust rates again before the new rates take effect in 2023.

In 2022, the Commission will continue working with the Office of the State Treasurer (OST) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to assess impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on traffic and revenues for the SR 520 Bridge, with intent of being prepared for possible adjustments to the adopted toll rate increase in 2023.

I-405 Express Toll Lanes/SR 167 HOT Lanes Corridor

Rate Setting: There was no toll rate change in 2021 for the I-405 Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) nor the SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes. The Commission is assessing future needs, including the possibility of adjusting toll rates, in advance of the opening of the future Bellevue to Renton segment of the I-405 ETLs/SR 167 HOT Lanes.

The I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes are dynamically tolled, meaning the price to travel in these lanes varies based upon throughput and volumes and is adjusted automatically using an algorithm. There are overhead electronic signs displaying the toll rate at any given time. In 2015, the Commission set the toll rate range for the I-405 ETLs at $0.75 minimum to $10.00 maximum and has not made any changes since. In 2008, the Commission set the toll rate range for the SR 167 HOT lanes at $0.50 minimum, and $9.00 maximum and has not made any changes since. Vehicles with at least three occupants are always exempt from tolls on the I-405 ETLs, and vehicles with at least 2 occupants are exempt on the SR 167 HOT lanes and are also exempt during non-peak hours on the I-405 ETLs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to result in sharply decreased traffic and revenue performance for the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes. Tolled lane performance improved through mid-2021 compared to 2020, particularly for the SR 167 HOT lanes which saw traffic volumes improve to within 6-13 percent of pre-COVID levels. Through the summer and fall of 2021, however, traffic volumes had leveled off as many companies maintained telework or hybrid work models, and as mask and vaccine mandates increased.

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Toll revenue has faced even steeper declines because both the number of toll transactions and the average toll rate paid on the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes greatly reduced with the sharp decline in traffic volume. As a result, I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes revenues were sharply below pre-COVID expected levels for March 2020 through June 2021 with revenues 57% below (-$4.2 million) forecasted levels for the SR 167 HOT lanes, and 77% below (-$32.5 million) forecasted levels for the I-405 ETLs.

SR 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge

**Rate Setting:** In August 2021, the Commission adopted a 25 cents toll rate increase for the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), effective October 1, 2021, to cover anticipated debt payments, operations and maintenance costs.

The TNB has a unique financing structure in that it has scheduled, automatic increases in debt service payments. This fact has led to rate increases over the years to ensure toll revenues can meet the growing debt payments, and all legal obligations including covering the costs to maintain and operate the facility.

Legislation was passed in spring 2018 stating the intent to provide up to $85 million in loans through 2030, with toll revenues expected to pay off the loans. This was in an effort to keep toll rates at 2018 levels for the remaining life of the debt service, except for a one-time 25 cents rate increase as soon as July 1, 2021 (FY 2022). The TNB toll rate increase adopted by the Commission in 2021 meets these expectations.

Consistent with the loan plan, and to address the additional revenue needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic, in spring 2021 the Legislature provided support of $46 million for the 2021-23 biennium. Paired with the assumed rate increase for FY 2022, this was intended to keep toll rates at current levels for the 2021-2023 biennium. This included a loan of $30.3 million, and federal subsidy of $15.7 million. Assuming the Legislature continues to provide the loans as planned, no further rate increases are expected on the TNB through 2030.

SR 99 Tunnel

**Rate Setting:** In August 2021, the Commission adopted an across-the-board 15 percent toll rate increase for the SR 99 tunnel applied to all rates for all times of day, effective October 1, 2021. This resulted in rate increases between 15 cents to 35 cents.

In October 2018, the Commission adopted toll rates for the SR 99 tunnel facility to ensure tolls generate the required $200 million toward tunnel construction costs, and to pay other required costs. The tunnel opened for traffic in February 2019 and tolling began in early November 2019. The adopted toll rates were also set to minimize impacts of diversion to city streets.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 resulted in significant revenue disruption for the SR 99 tunnel and projected on-going impacts. As a result, the Office of the State Treasurer identified that the SR 99 tunnel did not meet financial requirements for FY 2020 and that options to increase net revenue were necessary to prevent failure to meet financial requirements in FY 2021 and beyond. The legislature addressed the FY 2021 shortfall and a portion of the FY 2022 shortfall with additional loans in the current transportation budget, while the toll rate increase adopted by the Commission in August 2021 began to address the remaining shortfall.

The Commission anticipates preparing for an additional rate increase in July 2022. The current toll rate schedule sets forth rate increases of 3 percent every three years beginning in July 2022, subject to the Commission confirming its approval.

I-405 & SR 167 Express Toll Lanes Low-Income Tolling Study

In 2019, the Legislature directed the Commission to assess options for a possible low-income toll program for the I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes. The Commission began the study in December 2019 and submitted the final report to the Legislature in August 2021.

Work on this study in 2021 centered on a quantitative assessment of two possible discount options for a low-income toll program, as selected by the Commission in January 2021, and development of the final report with findings and recommendations. This followed work in 2020 that identified existing low-income programs and frameworks around the country, and an assessment of our state’s operational capacity to implement possible approaches. Research was also conducted on both how and why low-income drivers use the facilities, and what possible low-income toll program options may provide the most value for low-income drivers of the facilities.

This study made significant progress in identifying options, challenges, and considerations for a possible I-405 ETLs / SR 167 HOT lanes low-income toll discount program, as captured in the study findings. These findings informed the development of recommended program options and recommended next steps needed to fully assess and identify the detailed parameters of a low-income toll program to ensure it is both sustainable and effective. More information can be found in the final Low-Income Tolling Report posted on the Commission’s web page.

Planning for Future Toll Projects

In 2021 the Commission continued to engage with WSDOT on its planning efforts for future tolled facilities. This includes three facilities authorized for tolling by the Legislature in the central Puget Sound Region: the I-405 ETLs from Bellevue to Renton, and the SR 509 and SR 167 Expressway projects (Gateway Program). While tolling is not expected to begin on these facilities until the mid-2020s, the Commission has been an active partner in developing tolling assumptions and estimates and will continue to do so in 2022.
The Commission also began engagement in 2021 with WSDOT and Oregon Department of Transportation on legislatively directed planning efforts for replacing the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River. Current efforts will support selection of a proposed project design and funding needs by the Legislature, including potential toll authorization in support of financial requirements and traffic management.

Tolling Exemption Policies

The Commission did not make any changes in 2021 to current tolling exemption policies.

Ferry Fares

**Rate Setting:** Each biennium, the Commission sets fares to meet the revenue target and policy objectives set by the Legislature. The process begins nearly a year before new fares and policies take effect, beginning with extensive discussions involving Washington State Ferries (WSF), the Commission, and the Ferry Advisory Committee on Tariffs (FAC-T), representing Ferry Advisory Committees (FACs) systemwide, citizens, and interested parties who use each ferry route, including transit, freight, and tourism.

In August 2021, the Commission approved two across-the-board fare increases of 2.5-percent, effective October 1, 2021, and October 1, 2022. The Commission also approved a change to the occupancy requirement for vanpools from five to three persons to align with the updated legal definition of ride sharing. Fare revenues are estimated to generate about $378 million in the 2021-2023 biennium, about 70% of the funding approved by the Legislature for WSF operations in the biennium.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have greatly impacted our ferry system’s ridership volumes and revenues. The Commission has been working closely with WSF to monitor ridership volumes and revenues in the 2021-2023 biennium, and to address possible changes related to the fare schedule in the future.

In 2021, the Commission continued to engage with WSF on advancing strategies to improve the reliability, sustainability, and resiliency of the ferry system in alignment with the WSF 2040 Long Range Plan and with on-going administration of the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) survey made up of about 25,000 ferry riders. The Commission has also engaged with WSF on assessing a low-income passenger fare pilot program, which if funded by the Legislature, would include an origin and destination study, a fare elasticity study, and consultations with low-income and under-represented communities for input on the approach and design of the pilot.

**Road Usage Charge Assessment**

As vehicles become less reliant on fossil fuels, more fuel-efficient, and increasingly automated, our method of paying for roads must evolve as well. As fuel-efficiency grows, gas tax revenues will decline (see Figure 1 below). In 2012, the Legislature directed the Commission to fully assess road usage charging (RUC), a pay-by-the-mile fee that could eventually replace the per-gallon state gasoline tax, so that drivers of all vehicle types contribute towards roadway funding in proportion to their roadway use.

If all vehicles pay the same per mile rate in road usage charges, EV drivers still maintain a significant operating cost advantage, compared to gas-powered vehicles given fuel costs remain a significant cost. (see Figure 2 below)
By 2013, the Commission determined that a per-mile fee system is feasible and could generate more sustainable revenue than the state’s gasoline tax in the long term. In 2019, the Commission completed a statewide RUC pilot with over 2,000 participating vehicles and, in 2020, released its Road Usage Charge Assessment Final Report. The report recommended starting now with a gradual transition to road usage charging in Washington, including an initial start-up phase on a limited set of passenger vehicles to continue to inform and shape a long-term transition plan before there is broad, fleetwide adoption in the future. (see Figure 3 below)

In 2020, Washington received an additional $5.5 million federal grant to advance its Forward Drive program, which is funding further research that is currently ongoing, on the following topics:

- The impacts of RUC on low-income households, communities of color, and displaced and vulnerable populations;
- Financial impacts on transportation revenue, including a prospective RUC, as shared-ride services expand, autonomous vehicles emerge, and car ownership potentially declines;
- Opportunities to reduce the costs of collecting a RUC by working with partners in other states; and
- Exploration of the latest approaches to mileage reporting and RUC administration, including in-vehicle telematics, improved smartphone apps, and manual reporting.

Details on the current research and findings thus far can be found in the Commission’s Forward Drive annual report found on the Commission’s web site. Some of the work done in 2021 includes refining RUC financial models with a new vehicle miles traveled (VMT) forecast tool that incorporates COVID-related sensitivity to increased teleworking and decreased discretionary trips along with an economic resurgence through 2050.

Work is also well underway on assessing the potential impacts RUC may have on underrepresented communities. In 2021, a series of focus groups, interviews, and roundtable discussions were held with organizations representing underserved communities. (see Figure 4 below)

A financial analysis of the likely impacts of RUC on low-income households and rural drivers was completed, a key finding from which is that fuel tax currently amounts to 1.4% of total low-income household expenditures, on average. The lowest-income households spend about 40% of income on transportation-related expenditures, noting the vast majority - over 90% - is related to car ownership, with the single biggest cost category being vehicle purchase, financing, lease, etc. Fuel taxes or RUC are only about 4% of transportation costs for low-income households. (see Figure 5 on top of next page)
Based on the available data, the analysis concluded that, although individual circumstances would vary, a revenue-neutral switch from gas taxes to RUC would, on average, slightly benefit low-income households.

As a part of Forward Drive, the project team also met with automakers, automotive data aggregators, transportation service providers (including network companies), and tolling and RUC vendors to refine concepts for new solutions and features to improve the user experience, enhance equity, and reduce costs. The team also conducted cost reduction workshops with partner organizations including Utah and Oregon DOTs and the Department of Licensing on the topics of customer service, procurement, and enforcement.

For more information about WA RUC and the Commission’s ongoing research and assessment of RUC, visit: www.waroadusagecharge.org

**Washington Transportation Plan 2040 and Beyond**

*Washington’s transportation system safely connects people and communities—fostering commerce and economic opportunity for all, operating seamlessly across boundaries, and providing travel options to achieve an environmentally and financially sustainable system.*

This vision statement guided development of *WTP 2040 and Beyond*, Washington’s 20-year statewide transportation policy plan, adopted in 2018. A comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, *WTP 2040 and Beyond* is consistent with the state’s growth management goals and is based on the six transportation policy goals established in RCW 47.04.280.

- Economic vitality
- Preservation
- Safety
- Mobility
- Environment
- Stewardship

RCW 47.01.510 directs the Commission to appoint and convene an executive and legislative Work Group to gather information and develop policy recommendations to prepare for the operation of AVs on public roadways in the State of Washington. The law requires the Commission to submit an annual report of findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature each year. The 2021 AV report can be found on the Commission’s web site. The information below provides high-level information, with much more detail to be found in the full annual report posted on the Commission’s web site.

The AV industry is in flux with many questions left unanswered and potential future realities unknown. Lower levels of automation are being deployed in vehicles today, and higher levels of automation are being tested and deployed in limited scenarios across the country. Four companies are currently self-certified with the Washington Department of Licensing to test AVs on Washington’s public roadways, as of late 2021 – BMW of North America, LLC; NVIDIA Corporation; Waymo LLC; and Zoox, Inc.

The Work Group consists of a 35-member Executive Committee, and seven subcommittees supported by nine state agencies. Each subcommittee has a broad-based membership comprised of interest groups, stakeholders, public and private organizations, etc.

The Work Group kicked off 2021 with the passage of legislation that implemented some of their recommendations. Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5460 created a definition of “autonomous vehicle” for the self-certification program and repealed an outdated law that prohibited some advanced vehicle technologies.

In 2021, the Work Group continued its ongoing education and knowledge building with research, industry presentations, a national policy update, and hearing how other states are approaching AV testing and deployments. As the Work Group approaches its sunset date of 2023, they worked this year to shift focus towards more specific planning and research efforts that will support and inform long-term...
Continuing on from the Commission’s work during the 2020 legislative session, the Commission established the AV Work Group (AVWG) to provide the Governor and Legislature with a “Roadmap to the Future” to serve as a guide for future policy and regulatory implementation.

While the subcommittees did not generate recommendations this year, based on discussions and input from the Executive Committee, the Commission has issued one recommendation for law makers to consider:

**Recommendation:**
Advance a state AV testing program that could be comprised of one or both of the following approaches:

- Establish an AV testing grant program where state funding would be made available as either grants or loans to local jurisdictions to assist in leveraging and funding local AV testing.
- Implement a state-sponsored, focused AV test where private sector partners would be retained to assist the state in testing identified aspects of AV operations, in specified locations around the state.

The Legislature should direct the Commission and the AV Work Group to establish a scope and implementation plan which provides further details on both approaches and identifies the level of funding needed to carry out each approach. The Commission should be required to report back to the Washington State Legislature by the 2023 session with the results of this work and recommendations.
Ferry Riders’ Opinion Group

The Commission conducts surveys of ferry riders each year to provide the Governor, the Legislature, the Commission, and WSDOT insights and guidance on ferry operations by the people and businesses that use the ferry system. The Ferry Riders’ Opinion Group (FROG) is an on-line community of about 25,000 Washington State Ferry (WSF) riders who participate on the survey panel to weigh in on ferry issues through on-line surveys and quick polls. This allows for longitudinal data to be collected over time to understand how reactions to key issues and operations are changing.

In 2021, the Winter Ferry Performance study, traditionally conducted each year to measure ferry performance, returned after a year hiatus. The Winter Ferry Performance study was not conducted in 2020 due to pandemic impacts to travel. The study surveyed 3,949 riders regarding their travel behaviors and frequency between January and March 2021. The survey was fielded via the FROG panel as well as being made available to non-panel members via an open link publicized via WSF communications that include rider alerts, website, newsletter, and social media posts.

The survey included benchmark questions measuring overall experience and satisfaction with WSF touchpoints, as well as questions measuring riders’ feelings of safety when it came to COVID-19 protocol adherence such as mask wearing and enhanced cleanliness practices. In addition to these experiential questions, riders were also asked three questions about their willingness to pay an increased capital surcharge.

Some key findings from the 2021 Winter Ferry Performance study include:

- Overall satisfaction (‘extremely satisfied’ plus ‘somewhat satisfied’) with WSF was 68% in 2021, a similar level as 2019 (67%).
- When compared to 2019, 2021 saw an increase of 6 percentage points in riders who are extremely satisfied (37%) with the service WSF provides.
- Dissatisfaction in 2021 remains the same as 2019 at nearly a quarter (24%) of riders reporting dissatisfaction.
- Riders on the San Juan Inter-Island and Anacortes/San Juan routes have higher levels of dissatisfaction than other routes (49% and 44%, respectively).
- Presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the way riders interact with WSF has changed and there are significantly fewer touchpoints experienced by each rider as they board and ride WSF. Specifically, significantly fewer riders are:
  - Visiting the passenger vessel deck (59% vs. 89% in 2019).
  - Interacting with the vessel crew (21% vs. 30% in 2019).
  - Walking onto the ferry (24% vs. 60% in 2019).
  - Going inside a terminal (31% vs. 66% in 2019).
- Regarding health and safety riding during the pandemic, more than eight in ten (85%) riders report feeling safe, a similar number as recorded in 2020 when the Commission fielded a special COVID-19 impact study.
- When provided information on the cost of a new ferry, riders, on average, said they would be willing to pay up to $0.41 more (a total of $0.91) in a capital surcharge. There is no difference in willingness to pay when comparing vehicle and foot passengers.

Naming Transportation Facilities

The Commission is authorized to name state highways, bridges, and ferries. The following naming actions occurred in 2021:

- **May:** Resolution 742 named State Route 165 “The Carbon Glacier Highway,” commemorating the significance of the Carbon Glacier to the State of Washington.
- **December:** Resolution 743 named the state’s next new, hybrid electric Olympic Class 144-car ferry the “Wishkah”.
- **December:** Resolution 744 named the Tacoma Amtrak Cascades station the “Tacoma Dome Station.”
Each community and region in our state has unique transportation needs, challenges, and successes. This section presents key findings – a top 10 list – from the Commission’s 2021 local meetings in Lakewood, Wenatchee, Spokane, and Ocean Shores. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, these meetings were held virtually. The Commission’s local meetings focus on hearing from city, county and regional representatives, business, transit, tribes, ports, etc. to gather information on transportation opportunities, challenges, and needs they are facing.

**Lakewood - April 2021**

1. A key priority for the City of Lakewood and many of their partners is rail safety along the Point Defiance Bypass Route. The bypass route runs through the city with seven at-grade crossings. Amtrak trains traveling through the bypass can reach speeds of 79 miles per hour. As part of “Connecting Washington,” two of these seven crossings are being reconstructed to be grade separated.

2. Sound Transit’s (ST) top priority for resuming passenger services along the Point Defiance Bypass (Bypass) is ensuring safety issues are addressed. ST is working to ensure compliance of all applicable safety and regulatory requirements prior to the resumption of service on the Bypass. They have also instituted additional safety measures along the corridor, such as positive train control (PTC).

3. Joint Base Lewis-McChord’s (JBLM) biggest challenges are encroachment, environment, and encirclement. JBLM has transportation concerns surrounding the base as well as maintaining efficient movement between the base, the Yakima Training Center, and the Port of Tacoma.

4. A United States Geological Services hydrologic study found that flooding events in the Nisqually Delta will continue to increase in magnitude and frequency, potentially leading to the overtopping of I-5 on a more regular basis in the future. The risk of a major event that could result in the destruction of this portion of I-5 is not a matter of if, but when, and could be within the next 20 years.

5. Over the past 10 to 15 years, the Nisqually Tribe has become increasingly aware of the importance of off-reservation connectivity and how the external road system is critical to tribal community development. The tribe’s biggest transportation concern is the future of I-5 through the Nisqually Delta – both the usability of I-5 and the impacts of I-5 on the Nisqually River and salmon recovery.

6. The South Sound Military & Communities Partnership has identified the Nisqually Region I-5 project as their highest priority transportation project in the area. If funded, the Nisqually Region I-5 project will: reduce flooding impacts and the risk of a major event that could render this stretch of I-5 impassable for transportation; add much needed capacity to handle growing congestion concerns; elevate I-5 across the Nisqually Delta; and restore critical ecological function to increase salmon survival.

7. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) recently completed a Regional Baseline Aviation Study that identifies approaches to addressing future aviation growth and travel needs throughout the region. The key takeaways from the study are demand for commercial service and air cargo will more than double by 2050, while demand for general aviation will increase by about 1/3 by 2050, all taking place in complex and constrained airspace.

8. Pierce Transit is incorporating regional data and demographics, available through the PSRC, into its fixed route service level decision making. In September 2020, as they assessed their fixed route service levels, Pierce Transit considered equity, efficiency, and geographic connectivity impacts, and will continue to do so going forward.

9. United Way of Pierce County’s “2-1-1 Ride United” is a connector service which assists under-served populations in accessing hundreds of services and programs in the Tacoma area. The service was initially focused on transportation needs within Tacoma. After the COVID-19 Pandemic started, “2-1-1 Ride United” was expanded to include services related to healthcare, employment, food access, financial assistance, public benefits, and education, as well as expanding the service area to outside of the City of Tacoma.

10. The City of Tacoma has developed an equity index, which is an interactive tool that visually highlights disparities within geographic areas of Tacoma. It uses 29 different data points sorted into five categories to determine where access to services is needed or where services do not meet community needs. The five categories are: accessibility, economy, education, livability, and environmental health. The tool is used to support data-driven decision making aimed at improving access and equity.
1. Wenatchee is one of only eight metropolitan areas in the United States not connected to an interstate by a four-lane highway.

2. Partners across the Wenatchee Valley are working to complete the Apple Capital Loop project. A $92.4 million federal INFRA grant was secured in 2021. The region now looks to the state for the remaining $120 million needed to complete the Apple Capital Loop. The project achieves four key things: brings together four vital, interconnected projects that address congestion on SR 285 and US 2/97; creates a rapid transit corridor into downtown; establishes a third evacuation route out of the city; and sets the region up for continued growth and economic prosperity.

3. Transportation is an important component of the recreation tourism sector of the local and regional economy and plays a major role in the ability to attract visitors. The region’s tourism economy will benefit from improvements to the US 2 highway corridor between I-5 and Wenatchee, and more frequent and reliable passenger train service to Leavenworth and Wenatchee.

4. Throughout the Wenatchee Valley, public entities and private companies are investing in renewable hydrogen and electric vehicles for public transportation, business operations and freight. The Douglas Public Utility District produces two tons of hydrogen each day, which is sold wholesale for industrial and transportation uses.

5. Wenatchee’s Complete Streets program, created in 2016, has increased transportation options for citizens and improved public health by creating safe sidewalks and bike lanes, especially in areas with high concentrations of disadvantaged populations. The program has also been a tool for removing transportation barriers and improving equity by creating safer walking and bicycling through safety and traffic calming improvements in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The program received a perfect score from Smart Growth America, an international organization that evaluates local Complete Streets policies and initiatives.

6. Link Transit has implemented six projects from their Vision 2020 plan, with another 13 projects in progress. Additionally, Link has successfully completed the electrification of 48% of their heavy-duty fleet, including four 300 kW wireless charging systems. They have also installed 19 level II car chargers at six park and ride stations available to the public.

7. As a small urban area, the Wenatchee Valley needs state transportation funding assistance to address growing transportation needs as its population grows. Small urban areas like the Wenatchee Valley, often have complex, multimodal and high-cost infrastructure needs that are urban in character. State funding allocations need to consider this unique situation so that the transportation needs of growing urban centers, within a rural surrounding, can be addressed.

8. Since the early 2000s, Link Transit has been making changes to better meet the needs of paratransit users while reducing operating costs. Paratransit users have access to “travel training” which teaches them how to use fixed route services, focusing on the goal of empowering riders to choose fixed route service even though they are eligible for specialized paratransit services. On average, paratransit users who receive travel training saves Link Transit about $40 per trip, or $7,680 annually.

9. The Wenatchee Valley currently has two points of entry, both of which are state highway bridges over the Columbia and Wenatchee Rivers. Closure of either of these bridges creates significant access issues and puts efficient emergency response at risk, especially problematic during natural disaster events such as wildfires.

10. A large and rapidly growing data center industry cluster that started in Grant County, is expanding into Douglas and Chelan Counties, increasing demand on both the SR 28 highway connection between the three counties, as well as commercial air service through Pangborn Memorial Airport. Long-term capacity improvements will be needed to accommodate the industry growth.
Spokane - September 2021

1. Spokane County has experienced significant growth in recent years. From 2010 to 2020, the county’s population grew 14.5% to nearly 540,000, and in 2020, the City of Spokane was ranked #5 fastest growing city in Updater’s 2020 Moving Destinations Report (Top 20 Inbound Cities - Indexed by City Size).

2. The City of Spokane is using geographic information system (GIS) mapping information and equity data to inform road maintenance planning and decisions, supporting improved access long-term.

3. As the Spokane area grows, the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) faces three primary community challenges: growth and development; equity; and funding constraints. In response to these challenges, SRTC and multiple partners have undertaken several planning activities, such as their US 195/I-90 Area Study, which looks at local connectivity and safety to improve conditions for residents.

4. Beginning in January 2022, the SRTC will begin the installation of electric vehicle charging stations across fifty-one locations throughout their planning area, funded by a grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce.

5. Spokane International Airport has restored all commercial air service routes that were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have started adding routes to new cities, expanding service and now has more direct routes than pre-Covid.

6. Due to the Kalispel Tribe of Indians’ geographic isolation, tribal members are challenged to access essential services. The tribe established Kaltran, which is their public transportation service providing daily service to and from Spokane. The service is free to riders, and receives federal, state, and local contributions.

7. The Kalispel Tribe of Indians’ road system is in dire need of improvement. The roads are generally in poor condition and have high accident and fatality rates. Tribal leadership has prioritized the need for safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian paths along the roadways, including a safe connection over the one bridge across the Pend Oreille River to connect citizens with economic development opportunities.

8. In advancing the North Spokane Corridor (NSC) project, a new approach to planning, referred to as “placemaking”, was utilized. This is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces to ensure community needs, priorities, and interests are addressed as a capital project is advanced.

9. The Spokane Transit Authority (STA) is halfway through the delivery of a plan approved by voters in 2016 authorizing an increase in local sales and use tax to help fund STA “Moving Forward” to maintain, improve, and expand public transit. The plan consists of 24 projects and service improvements.

10. “City Line”, which will be Spokane’s first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route, is expected to begin service in 2022. Built on the vision of providing a streetcar-like experience, the six-mile route will run between Spokane’s historic Browne’s Addition and Spokane Community College, connecting downtown and the University District.
1. The City of Ocean Shores’ population has grown by about 20% since 2010, which has resulted in an increased workforce, as well as an increased demand for housing, multimodal transit services, and durable roadways.

2. The counties within the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO) boundaries represent about 10% of the state’s land mass and 12% of total roadway miles, but only 3.8% of the population. With no major economic center, planning for and prioritizing the area’s needs has been difficult. The recently completed 2022-2025 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) identified 113 projects in the SWRTPO area, which in total are estimated to cost about $597 million in local, state, and federal funds. Included are 34 bridge preservation projects, 28 environmental (fish passage) projects, and 26 safety projects.

3. Public transportation is a critical need in the region. SWRTPO’s mobility management program enables connectivity between individual systems within and outside of the five-county region and supports efforts to provide safe and efficient travel options for the most vulnerable populations.

4. Tourism is currently the 4th largest economic sector in Grays Harbor County which provides needed revenues from both lodging and sales tax. During peak months, Ocean Shores sees average visitor volumes in excess of 20,000 people per day.

5. Landslides, mudslides, and flooding have resulted in closures to SR 115 and SR 109 in recent years. When these roads are closed due to natural disasters, the Ocean Shores coastal community is effectively cut-off, with inefficient detour options that entail significant travel time.

6. Having reliable tsunami evacuation capabilities is a concern throughout Grays Harbor County. Roughly 60% of Grays Harbor County residents, or about 45,000 people, live within the inundation zone of a potential tsunami. If evacuation were needed quickly, there would be significant congestion on SR 115 and SR 109, which are the main highways in and out of Ocean Shores and the surrounding communities.

7. In response to COVID-19, Grays Harbor Transportation Authority (GHTA) has reduced services, installed barriers, suspended fare collection, and enhanced sanitation efforts for their fleet and facilities. GHTA plans to return their weekend service starting in January 2022 and will remain fare-free until December 31, 2022. As well, GHTA hopes to utilize grant funding to electrify their system by as early as 2026.

8. US 12 is the main travel route through Aberdeen and accessing communities in Grays Harbor. Adjacent to US 12 is a rail line used for the movement of freight to and from the Port of Grays Harbor, with seven at-grade rail crossings across the highway. The City of Aberdeen’s US 12 Highway-Rail Separation Project, which will add a roundabout and overcrossing on US 12 to relieve congestion, will increase mobility, improve safety and non-motorized access, and improve freight movement to and from the Port of Grays Harbor. While planning and design work is in progress, approximately $48.3 million remains needed for right of way acquisition and construction costs.

9. There are over 50 formally identified trails in Grays Harbor County which make up roughly 140 miles. Grays Harbor Council of Government’s long-term goal is to connect Aberdeen to Montesano with interconnected trails.

10. The Port of Grays Harbor (Port) is the 2nd oldest port district in Washington State, having been chartered in 1911. They are the west coast’s leading exporter of soy meal, which is a protein supplement produced from the residue left after soy oil extraction. As the demand for soy oil increases, the port anticipates a 100% growth in soy meal in the next four to five years. As such, improvements to the port’s infrastructure are needed to meet storage needs.
Commission Roles and Responsibilities

Key Facts
The Washington State Transportation Commission (Commission) is a seven-member body of citizens appointed by the Governor for up to two six-year terms. The WSDOT Secretary and a representative from the Governor’s Office serve as ex officio members.

The Commission provides an open public forum for transportation policy development. It reviews and assesses how the entire transportation system works across the state and issues the state’s 20-year Washington Transportation Plan. As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission adopts state highway tolls and sets ferry fares. The Commission also conducts special studies and projects as directed by the Legislature.

Current Responsibilities in Detail

Washington Transportation Plan
Every four years, the Commission recommends to the Legislature a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, which also addresses local and regional needs. The plan must be consistent with the state’s growth management goals and is based upon six statutory transportation policy goals: preservation, economic vitality, safety, mobility, environment & health, and stewardship.

Tolling & Ferry Fare Responsibilities
The Commission adopts tolls for all state toll facilities including: the SR 520 bridge, the SR 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), the SR 167 HOT lanes, the I-405 express toll lanes, and the SR 99 tunnel. It actively monitors and assesses traffic and toll revenues; reviews and oversees toll collection processes, costs, and operational policies; and serves as a public forum for input on tolling. The Commission also adopts fare policies for Washington State Ferries (WSF) and reviews and adjusts fares. In addition, it reviews the long-range ferry system capital plan and works with WSF in developing operational strategies.

Ferry Customer Survey
The Commission conducts surveys of ferry customers at least once every two years, utilizing the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) survey panel that is made up of over 25,000 ferry riders. Data gathered from the FROG panel helps to inform WSF level of service, customer satisfaction, and decisions related to operations, pricing, planning, and investments.

Policy Guidance
The Commission offers policy guidance and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on a multitude of transportation topics and issues, including:

- Transportation finance and funding.
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system.
- Transportation infrastructure needs.
- 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 technology.
- Needed laws to prepare for the operation of Autonomous Vehicles operating on public roadways.

Public Involvement and Outreach
The Commission conducts public outreach both through meetings held in Olympia, and in communities throughout the state, which focus on local and regional transportation issues and challenges. The Commission also gathers statewide public input through its FROG survey panel, special projects and studies, and its public email and web site services.

Transportation Innovative Partnerships Program
The Commission may receive and solicit concepts or proposals for eligible public-private partnership (PPP) projects. In consultation with the Governor, it may execute, reject, or continue negotiations on proposed PPP projects.

Route Jurisdiction Transfer Program
Cities, counties, or WSDOT may petition the Commission to consider a revision to the state highway system. Once the Commission’s review is complete, it forwards a recommendation to the Legislature for final action in law.

Naming State Highways, Bridges, and Ferries
The Commission names state highways, bridges, and ferry vessels. The Legislature, community organizations, local governments, or individuals may submit a naming request. The Commission carefully considers community support and consults with WSDOT before acting to name a transportation facility or vessel.

Special Studies
The Commission conducts special studies or projects directed by the Legislature, which result in formal reports and recommendations to the Legislature and Governor. Studies or projects currently underway:

- The Road Usage Charge (RUC) is under assessment as a replacement to the gas tax. In January 2020, the Commission submitted a final report of findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, culminating over seven years of research and testing. In the fall of 2020, the Commission began a new phase of RUC research, as directed by the Legislature. The work is funded with a grant from the Federal Highways Administration.
- The Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Work Group advises the Commission in its task to make recommendations to the Legislature on policies that will enable the safe accommodation of AVs on public roadways statewide.
- The TNB Loan Update provides the Legislature with an annual status report on funding needed to provide up to $85 million in loans to the TNB Account.

For more information on the Commission, please visit our website: www.wstc.wa.gov
Commissioners

**Roy Jennings, Chair, Clark County**
Roy retired from the United States Marine Corps (USMC) as a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer after 20 years of honorable service. While in the USMC, he worked on various transportation projects including airports, ports, railheads, as well as building roads. In 1997, he and his family moved to Southwest Washington, where he drove a transit bus for over 20 years. A graduate of the University of Oregon Labor Education & Research Center. Roy has served the citizens of Southwest Washington as the Secretary-Treasurer, Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, as a member of the Executive Board, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, a board member on the board of Directors for C-TRAN. Roy also served as the Treasurer of the Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2014. Roy was reappointed by Governor Inslee in 2019. His term expires June 30, 2025.

**Debbie Young, Vice Chair, San Juan County**
Debbie brings 30 years of management, negotiation, and natural resources experience to the Commission. She worked in the utility industry for over 20 years as the Natural Resources Manager for Tacoma Power, leading the federal licensing process for Tacoma’s hydroelectric projects. Debbie has served on the National Hydropower Association Board, the Tahoma Land Conservancy, and the Forterra Board of Directors. She also served on the Nisqually River Council for over 15 years, including a term as Chairman. Debbie now resides on Lopez Island where she and her husband operate a small farm providing meat and specialty food products to customers in the Puget Sound region. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2015 for a partial term. She was reappointed in 2016. Her term expires June 30, 2022.

**Shiv Batra, King County**
Shiv was a co-founder and President of a US based engineering company for over two decades. He has held leadership roles in numerous engineering and construction organizations, promoting innovations, technology transfer, civic, and professional development activities locally, nationally, and internationally. He also served two terms as a US Commissioner for the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congress (PIANC). Shiv and his wife are active in many local and international non-profit organizations. Appointed by Governor Inslee in January 2016. Shiv was reappointed in 2019. His term expires June 30, 2025.

**Kelly Fukai, Spokane County**
Kelly’s career has focused on building and cultivating relationships with officials at all levels of government as well as in the aviation, energy, electrical, and electronic manufacturing fields. Currently, Kelly is the Manager of Public and External Affairs at Spokane International Airport. She brings over 20 years of experience in leading and working with diverse groups with divergent interests in the development of collaborative and comprehensive plans and policy to grow necessary infrastructure, enhance economic and workforce development, and support community interests. She has previously worked at Avista, the Pinnacle Marketing Group, and Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories. Kelly earned a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting and a Master’s degree in Business Administration and Management from Gonzaga University. Kelly and her family reside in the City of Spokane. Appointed by Governor Inslee in June 2020. Her term ends June 2026.

**Jerry Litt, Grant County**
Jerry brings 40 years experience in planning and community development to the Commission. He was the Director of Planning and Community Development for the City of Lacey for 13 years, following 10 years with Douglas County, and has done consulting throughout Eastern Washington. His experience includes developing Douglas County’s award-winning GMA public involvement program and the City of Lacey’s “Designing Downtown 2000” program. He has been an executive board member for the Washington City Planning Director’s Association, a past president of the Washington County and Regional Planning Director’s Association, and a member of the Transportation Improvement Board. Appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2011. Jerry was reappointed by Governor Inslee in 2017. His term expires June 30, 2023.

**James “Jim” A. Restucci, Yakima County**
Jim has over 35 years of government service as a Soldier in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard for 20 years and as a city official. The mayor of Sunnyside from 2010 to 2018, he is now serving his 5th term on the City Council. Jim has chaired the Yakima Valley Transportation Policy Board for the past 9 years. He served as President of the Association of Washington Cities in 2016, and also was President of People for People, Inc. Jim currently oversees the daily operations of a technology services company he co-founded in 2002. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2018. His term expires June 30, 2024.

**Hester Serebrin, King County**
Hester is the Policy Director at Transportation Choices Coalition, a statewide organization working to bring Washingtonians more affordable, sustainable, and reliable transportation choices to connect them with jobs, housing, education, and each other. With partner organizations, she develops transportation policy recommendations to improve health and equity outcomes. A member of the Executive Board of the Puget Sound Regional Council, Hester sits on several of its committees. She has a Bachelor’s degree from Reed College and a Master’s degree in Public Administration from the University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance. She is a two-time winner of the Women’s Transportation Seminar Senator Scott White Memorial Scholarship. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2015. Hester was reappointed in 2021. Her term expires June 30, 2027.