



## Section 2 Guiding the Plan

## Section 2: Guiding the Plan

The Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan establishes the strategic framework for meeting the Skagit region's existing and future transportation needs. The Plan expresses regional priorities and serves as a link between local government comprehensive plans, tribal transportation plans, Skagit Transit plans and the Washington Transportation Plan.

Transportation facilities and services cross jurisdictional boundaries and the traveling public often perceives the transportation system as one set of continuous facilities that connect from point A to point B – not that the state may control one section, Skagit County another, and a local city or town yet another segment of their trip. It is a regional transportation system of connected facilities that is available for public use.

There are numerous federal and Washington state requirements related to Skagit 2045. Federal law requires preparation of a metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) for the Skagit region, while

the Washington state Growth Management Act (GMA) sets forth the requirements for the regional transportation plan (RTP). Skagit 2045 addresses both federal and Washington state transportation planning requirements.

Federal and Washington state requirements for

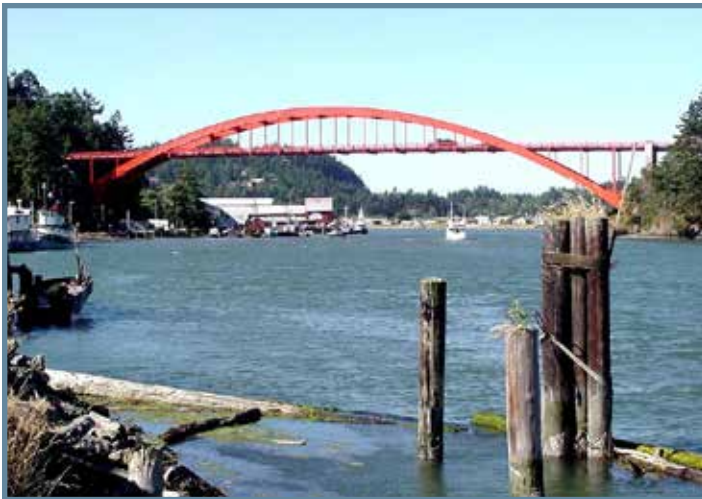
Skagit 2045 require public participation in preparing the Plan. SCOG's Transportation Policy Board and its member agencies support public input – the success of any plan depends on the support of the community it serves.

The integrated Plan examines the Skagit region's transportation needs over the next 25 years. Skagit 2045 builds upon strategies identified by Washington state and local agencies to address short-, mid-, and long-term transportation needs for the Skagit region. The projects in the Plan are, however, constrained by available funding. Therefore, Skagit 2045 identifies the priorities, policies and strategic framework for defining and prioritizing improvements. The Plan is multimodal, with individual projects and strategies serving multiple travel modes and meeting a range of regional priorities. Strategies for expanding funding for regional transportation needs are also identified.

### Transportation Planning Organizations

SCOG has a federally enabled and state enabled role in transportation planning in the Skagit region. SCOG is the authorized metropolitan planning organization in Skagit County. The metropolitan planning area for the MPO is Skagit County, which is also the federally designated metropolitan statistical area. The authority for creating an MPO in Skagit County followed the designation of an urbanized area of over 50,000 population for the first time – an area surrounding Mount Vernon, Burlington and Sedro-Woolley – following the 2000 decennial census. Having such an area of over 50,000 individuals, is a prerequisite to the establishment of an MPO. MPOs carry out the continuous, cooperative, comprehensive metropolitan transportation planning process. The MPO in Skagit County was established in 2003.

SCOG is also the authorized regional transportation planning organization in Skagit County. The authority for RTPOs was included in



Rainbow Bridge over Swinomish Channel

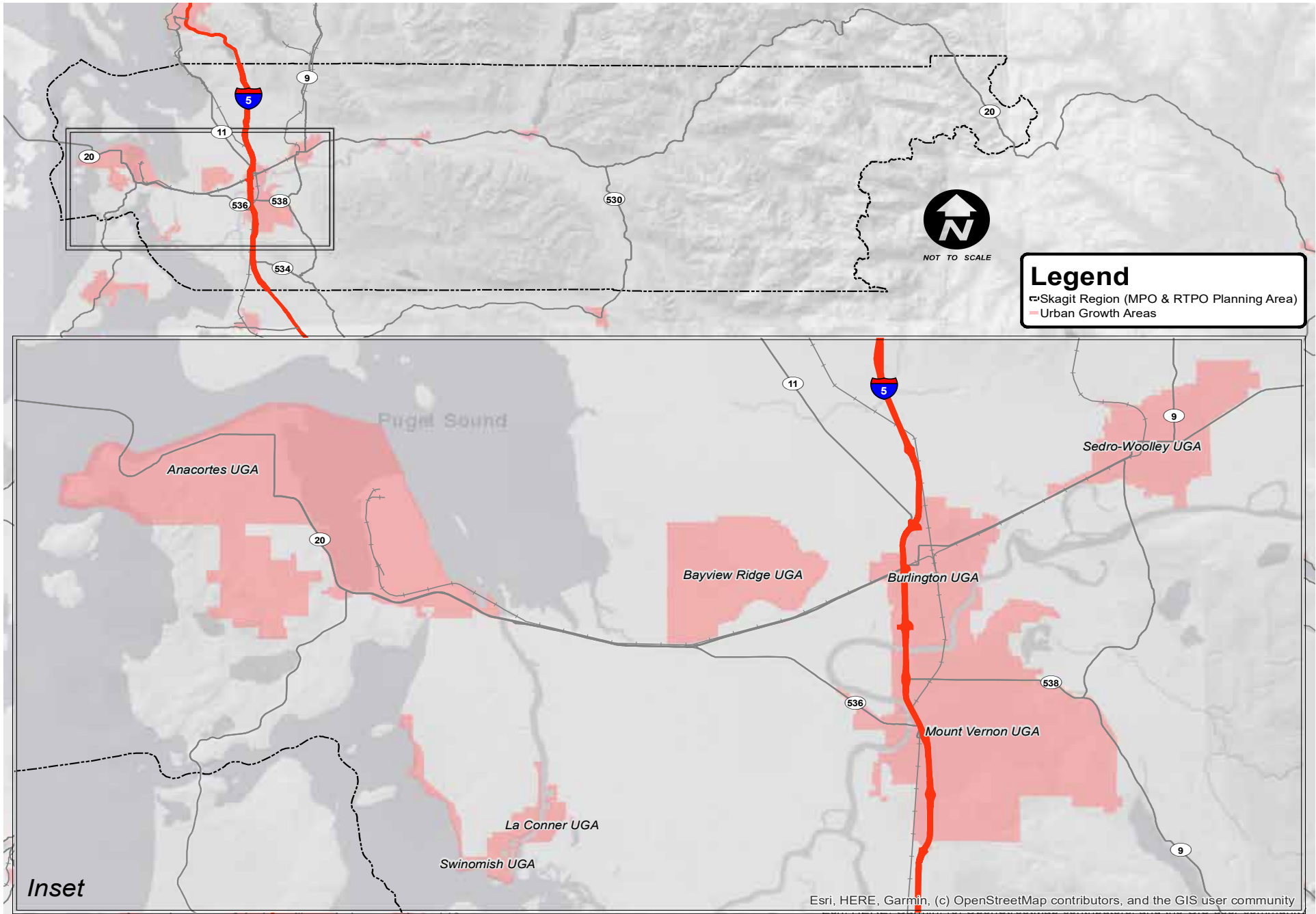


Exhibit 2-1 Metropolitan Planning Organization and Regional Transportation Planning Organization Boundaries

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### **Under the FAST Act, the metropolitan planning process shall provide for consideration of projects and strategies that will:**

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operations;
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
- Improve the reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and
- Enhance travel and tourism.

Washington state's Growth Management of 1990. Soon after, in 1991, Skagit County joined Island County to establish a two-county RTPO. RTPOs coordinate transportation planning at all jurisdiction levels, including the state, to ensure an interconnected regional transportation system. The RTPO statute indicates that in urbanized areas, the RTPO is to be the same as the MPO. SCOG became a single-county RTPO after the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization dissolved in 2015. The MPO and RTPO boundaries are now the same for SCOG. For the Plan, the term "Skagit region" is used for SCOG's planning area, which is the same as the metropolitan planning area under federal law and planning area under Washington state law. The boundaries of Skagit County and the Skagit region are the same. "Skagit County" is not used in Skagit 2045 to describe the planning area boundaries to avoid confusion with Skagit County government and its jurisdictional boundaries.

SCOG's Transportation Policy Board (TPB) is a governing body of SCOG, along with the Board of Directors, and is comprised of elected officials representing the

following 15 member jurisdictions:

- City of Anacortes;
- City of Burlington;
- City of Mount Vernon;
- City of Sedro-Woolley;
- Port of Anacortes;
- Port of Skagit;
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community;
- Samish Indian Nation;
- Skagit County;
- Skagit PUD #1;
- Skagit Transit;
- Town of Concrete;
- Town of Hamilton;
- Town of La Conner; and
- Town of Lyman.

Washington state legislators from the 10th, 39th, and 40th legislative districts are ex-officio members of the Transportation Policy Board. Representatives from WSDOT and a major employer representative

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also sit on the TPB, though are not members of SCOG.

Development of the Plan is also supported by SCOG’s Technical Advisory Committee, SCOG’s Non-Motorized Advisory Committee and the Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee (aka “Planners Committee”). The Technical Advisory Committee provides technical advice to the TPB and is comprised of staffs from member jurisdictions of SCOG, including: public works directors; transportation planners and engineers; and other staff. This committee provides input on plans, programs, projects, and priorities used to support the development of Skagit 2045. The Non-Motorized Advisory Committee is a committee of volunteers with interests in modes of non-motorized transportation that provide advise to the Technical Advisory Committee. The Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee is not a SCOG committee, but provided advice as the Plan was being prepared related to population and employment growth forecasts. This committee is composed of planning directors, planners and other staff from Skagit County, the four cities and four towns.

## Federal and State Transportation Planning Requirements

Federal and Washington state requirements for the Plan guide much of the content in the Plan. Federal requirements relate to the Plan as a metropolitan transportation plan, and Washington state requirements as a regional transportation plan.

### Federal Transportation Planning Requirements

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) replaced the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century as the basis for federal surface transportation planning and funding upon being signed into law in December 2015. The FAST Act builds upon and expands planning requirements established in MAP-21 and prior

surface transportation legislation. The FAST Act was set to expire in 2020, but was been extended through September 2021 by the federal government.

According to federal law, metropolitan transportation plans, and the transportation improvement programs (TIP) that are based on these plans, must meet federal requirements in order for projects in the Skagit region to be eligible for expending federal transportation funds, primarily through the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.

The FAST Act includes several modifications and new provisions that relate to MPOs. These are summarized as follows:

- Adds to the scope of the metropolitan transportation planning process for consideration of projects and strategies that will improve resiliency and reliability of the transportation system, and enhance travel and tourism;
- Allows public transportation representatives on MPO policy boards to also serve as a representative of a local municipality;
- Identifying intercity bus facilities in addition to



Roundabout in Skagit Valley



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public transportation facilities in the MTP;

- Including capital and other investment strategies to reduce the vulnerability of the transportation system to natural disasters in the MTP;
- Considering the role of intercity buses and the beneficial role they may play in the regional transportation system in the MTP, as well as strategies and investments that may preserve and enhance these systems;
- Including public ports in participation activities;
- Expanding the definition of private providers of transportation to be included with participation activities; and
- Includes new optional requirements for the development of a congestion management plan in certain MPOs.

The FAST Act, similar to past federal surface transportation laws, requires the MTP to be based on a 20-year forecast period. Additional requirements for an MTP include relevant to Skagit 2045 include:



Bicyclists in Skagit County

- Must cover major roadways, transit, multimodal and intermodal facilities, with an emphasis on facilities that serve regional transportation functions;
- Should address capital projects, operational and management strategies to preserve and enhance

the performance and safety of the region's transportation system;

- Needs to include a financial analysis to show how the facility improvements can be implemented; and
- Financial analysis can also identify strategies to increase funding to support implementation of other regional transportation projects or programs.

The FAST Act is the first long-term reauthorization since 2005, being signed into law in 2015. MAP-21 was signed into law in 2012, but was only a two-year law, and was followed by numerous short-term extensions following its expiration in 2014. With the FAST Act, federal surface transportation legislation is settled out to 2020. To pay for transportation programs authorized in the FAST Act, continued appropriations from Congress will be necessary through their regular budget process.

### State Transportation Planning Requirements

Washington state's Growth Management Act sets forth state requirements for a regional transportation plan. As noted above, many of Washington's regional transportation planning requirements overlap with federal requirements.

Per RCW 47.80.030, Skagit 2045 shall be prepared in cooperation with WSDOT, ports, transit operators, and local governmental agencies in the region. Skagit 2045 is required to:

- Be based on a least-cost planning methodology that provides the most cost-effective transportation facilities, services, and programs;
- Identify existing and planned transportation facilities and

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programs that should function as an integrated regional transportation system;

- Establish level-of-service standards for certain state highways and ferry routes, to be developed jointly with WSDOT;
- Include a financial plan showing how the regional transportation plan can be implemented;
- Assess regional development patterns, capital investment and other measures; and
- Set forth a proposed regional approach to guide the development of the integrated, multimodal regional transportation system.

Standards and guidelines are provided by WSDOT to assist regional transportation planning organizations with preparing the regional transportation plan. These standards and guidelines cover identification and application of data, identification of projects, financial evaluations and coordination activities.

### Public Participation

The FAST Act, in accord with past federal surface transportation legislation, requires all MPOs to develop and use a documented participation plan. The participation plan must be in place prior to MPO adoption of transportation plans addressing FAST Act provisions. The FAST Act requires that the participation plan be developed in consultation with all interested parties, and that public information be made available in electronically accessible format and means, such as the internet.

In 2017, the Skagit Council of Governments developed an update to the Public Participation Plan. The adopted Public Participation Plan

identifies various outreach and involvement strategies, seeking to:

- Create opportunities for appropriate broad based, early, continuous and meaningful public participation in all plans, programs and projects;
- Provide a forum for discussion of regional issues;
- Foster an open exchange of information and ideas; and
- Engage the public in decision-making processes through a constructive community dialogue.

As part of implementing the Public Participation Plan, SCOG prepared and adopted a Public Involvement Plan specific to the development of Skagit 2045. The Public Involvement Plan has guided outreach activities during the planning process and is included in **Appendix B**.

### Identification of Interested Parties

An interested party is considered to be an individual or group potentially affected by Skagit 2045 including those who may not be aware they are affected. Consistent with federal law, these interested parties include:

- Individuals;
- Affected public agencies;
- Representatives of public transportation employees;
- Public ports;
- Freight shippers;
- Private providers of transportation (including intercity bus

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### The FAST Act defines “Interested Parties” as:

- Citizens;
- Affected public agencies;
- Representatives of public transportation employees;
- Freight shippers;
- Public ports;
- Private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators, employer-based commuting programs; such as a carpool program, vanpool program; transit benefit program, parking cash-out program, shuttle program, or telework program);
- Representatives of users of public transportation;
- Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities;
- Representatives of the mobility-impaired;
- Providers of freight transportation services; and
- Other interested parties.

operators) ;

- Representatives of users of public transportation;
- Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities;
- Representatives of persons with disabilities;
- Providers of freight transportation services; and
- Other interested parties.

For Skagit 2045, interested parties were identified based on input from SCOG’s Transportation Policy Board, advisory committees and past planning processes.

### Outreach and Public Information

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, outreach for the Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan update was primarily conducted through virtual public engagement activities in order to comply with Washington state’s social distancing guidelines. Key components of outreach

established in the Public Involvement Plan for Skagit 2045 include:

- Creation of a project-specific website;
- Remote consultation meetings;
- Remote notification strategies;
- Remote meetings of governing and advisory bodies; and
- A public comment period.

SCOG sought to provide equal access to outreach materials in Spanish for this plan update, with nearly all outreach materials and all virtual public input tools provided in Spanish. Spanish interpretation services were available upon request.

**Virtual Public Engagement.** A Skagit 2045 website ([www.skagit2045.org](http://www.skagit2045.org)) was created to act as a virtual landing platform and “information booth” for the Plan. This website was made fully available in English



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and Spanish, and included:

- Context for the Plan update;
- Links to other relevant documents;
- An event calendar and project schedule;
- Contact information and comment opportunities;
- Virtual public engagement tools, including an interactive comment map and online survey; and
- A subscription service for regular e-notifications.

Other virtual materials were developed to communicate elements of the Plan to the public. These included ArcGIS Online web maps of the regional transportation system and project list, a Story Map of public outreach survey results, and maps depicting travel model results showing traffic in 2018 and projected traffic in 2045.

**Notification.** Notification took many forms during the planning process. Skagit 2045 materials were provided throughout the planning process via the Skagit 2045 website. Updates were provided through blog posts and relevant pages on the website. The draft Plan was posted to SCOG’s website as well as the Skagit 2045 website, along with a

notification of the public review and comment period.

The notice of public comment period was posted in the Skagit Valley Herald, on SCOG’s website, and on the Skagit 2045 project website.

**Consultations.** Letters were sent out to federally recognized Indian tribes, federal agencies, state agencies, and regional air quality agency

and watershed private non-profit notifying them of the Plan update, and inviting them to consultation meetings. From the outreach, three consultation meetings were conducted with representatives from one federal agency, five state agencies and one private non-profit. After these consultation meetings, a follow-up letter went out to the same consulted parties on January 20, 2021 to notify them that the draft Plan had been released for public review and comment, and inviting each party to a follow-up consultation meeting along with any additional input they may have on the Plan.

**Transportation Policy Board Meetings.** SCOG’s Transportation Policy Board is the decision-making body for matters relating to regional transportation planning and has the authority for Plan adoption and amendment. Information about the Plan was presented at six TPB meetings in 2020, prior to the release of the draft Plan in January 2021 for public review and comment. Public comment was not permitted at remote TPB meetings due to their virtual setting of meetings; however, public comment was received for one week prior to the meeting and read into the record at

**The Seven Sections of Skagit 2045**

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Guiding the Plan
- III. Relationship to Other Plans
- IV. Transportation Priorities & Policies
- V. Transportation Improvements & Programs
- VI. Environmental Constraints
- VII. Financial Constraints

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**Exhibit 2-2 Public Prioritization Exercise for Project Types**



the meetings.

**Technical Advisory Committee Meetings.** SCOG’s Technical Advisory Committee provides technical advice to the Transportation Policy Board on transportation matters. The TAC had eight meetings during the planning process where elements of the Plan were discussed, prior to release of the draft Plan in January 2021. The TAC is not permitted to take public comment, though the public is welcome to attend TAC meetings and TAC meeting materials are readily available to the public

through SCOG’s website and email distribution lists.

**Other Advisory Committee Meetings.** Two other advisory committees provided technical advice during the planning process on an as-needed basis. One is SCOG’s Non-Motorized Advisory Committee, which provided advice related to non-motorized modes of transportation and facilities to support these modes in Skagit 2045. The other is not a SCOG committee, but is a staff advisory committee composed of local planning directors, planners and other government staff from Skagit County, and the eight cities and towns within the county. This committee is called the Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee, and they provided advice on the population and employment forecasts prepared for Skagit 2045.

**Public Comment Period.** A public review and comment period began shortly after the draft Plan was released by the Transportation Policy Board for review. The TPB released the Plan for review at their January 20,

2021 meeting. A 15-day comment period began on January 22, 2021 and ended on February 5, 2021. All comments received during the public comment period, along with staff responses to comments and suggested revisions to the draft Plan, are included in Appendix E.

### Public Input

Opportunities for public input occurred throughout the planning process, including during Plan preparation and during the draft Plan public comment period. Input received during Plan development is summarized in **Appendix D**. An example of input received during

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public outreach is included in **Exhibit 2-3**, showing relative priority for transportation project types. Input received during the draft Plan comment period is included in **Appendix E**.

**Public Input.** Input from the general public, and interested parties was obtained through all the opportunities for public involvement summarized above.

**Comment Period.** Upon issuance of the draft Plan, a comment period of 15 days was established prior to adoption of Skagit 2045 by the Transportation Policy Board, with the comment period occurring from January 22, 2021 through February 5, 2021.

## Main Takeaways

Skagit 2045 is intended to facilitate understanding between the public, member jurisdictions, WSDOT, and other interested parties about:

- The planning process used for the Plan;
- New approaches to public involvement in utilized;
- Relationships between the Plan and other plans and programs;
- Expected Environmental Justice impacts from Skagit 2045 projects;
- Regional system performance across five categories of federal performance measures;
- Prioritized transportation strategies and improvements;
- Opportunities for environmental protection and restoration;
- Tradeoffs associated with funding constraints; and
- Long-term transportation challenges and opportunities for the

Skagit region.

## Plan Updates

Under federal law, metropolitan transportation plans are required to be updated every five years in air quality attainment areas. The Skagit region is in an attainment area and, therefore, must update the Plan no later than March 2026. SCOG’s Transportation Policy Board can, however, amend the Plan as necessary prior to March 2026. A major update to the Plan is anticipated by March 2026, using data from the 2020 decennial census and other sources.

Under Washington state law, the Skagit region is required to periodically update the regional transportation strategy, which serves as a guide for updating the Plan. This strategy was approved in April 2020 as part of the planning process to update the Plan.