



Section 4  
**Transportation Priorities & Policies**

# Section 4: Transportation Priorities & Policies

Skagit 2045 guides investments in regional transportation system over the next 25 years. The Plan represents the efforts of governments serving the Skagit region to coordinate the planning of diverse transportation systems to support the region’s anticipated growth, and meet regional priorities and goals. The Plan was developed through a cooperative process that involved the public, the Washington State Department of Transportation and other state agencies, federally recognized Indian tribal governments, Skagit County, cities and towns, ports, transit agencies, private non-profits and a variety of other interested parties.

A wide range of regional transportation projects and strategies are identified in Skagit 2045. These projects and strategies create a comprehensive, integrated, multimodal transportation system to serve the region over the next 25 years. The total costs of these projects and strategies will outstrip the likely available future funding necessary to implement them. Because not all projects and strategies can be funded over the next 25 years, the Skagit region established priorities

for its transportation improvements. The priorities were used in the technical evaluation or projects and strategies to establish a prioritization framework for the Plan. The framework essentially identifies the core transportation needs which other regional improvements will tie into, and helps guide the preparation of the

fiscally constrained Plan. See **Section 7** for more information on fiscal constraint, including forecast revenues and expenditures during the timeframe of Skagit 2045.

## Regional Priorities

Through the planning process for Skagit 2045, regional priorities were prepared that focus on a systems approach to moving people, freight and goods. These regional priorities are cross-referenced with input received through virtual public engagement opportunities, to see how well aligned these priorities are with those who participated by providing input to the planning process. Through not intended to be representative of public opinion for the Skagit region, this input is valuable to see how well these regional priorities align with those who decided to express their views through the planning process. **Appendix D** includes an analysis of participants priorities that participated in public outreach opportunities for the Plan.

The priorities set for the regional transportation system are consistent with those established in the Washington Transportation Plan, the long-range statewide transportation plan in our state. The priorities for the Skagit region, in no particular order of priority, are **Economic Vitality, Preservation, Safety, Mobility, Environment** and **Stewardship**.

**Economic Vitality:** To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support and enhance the movement of people and goods, to ensure a prosperous regional economy.

The movement of freight and goods and supporting economic sectors that rely on the regional transportation system is a priority for the Skagit region. Freight movement plays an important role in the regional economy by transporting various raw materials and finished products to and from the region via rail, air, truck and ship.



Roundabout in Anacortes

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The efficient movement of freight is, therefore, important for the regional transportation system. These elements are also necessary for providing access to business and well-paying jobs. Of equal importance is the improvement of multimodal transportation networks for serving retail, service and tourism in the Skagit region's diverse communities.

**Preservation:** To maintain, preserve and extend the life and utility of prior investments in regional transportation systems and services.

The Skagit region understands the importance of preserving the existing rail, bridge, pavement, transit, river, ferry and airport facilities – each is a critical economic asset. However, revenues to governments directed toward transportation maintenance are inadequate. Governments at all levels find it difficult to supply general revenues to maintenance when those funds are needed elsewhere for other important purposes. Consequently, long-term maintenance and preservation, such as pavement management, is being deferred with long-term implications on increasing costs and degrading quality of the regional transportation system.

**Safety:** To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the regional transportation system.

The safety and security of all individuals who use the regional transportation system are of high importance in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of regional facilities. Improvements made to the network that aim to reduce fatalities and serious injuries, can also ease traffic congestion. While efforts to improve safety should be taken across all modes of transportation, there is greater emphasis on improving roadway safety for vehicular drivers and passengers,

bicyclists and pedestrians given the greater rates of fatalities and serious injuries in these modes.

**Mobility:** To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout the Skagit region, including congestion relief and improved freight mobility.

Improving regional connections to facilitate the movement of people and goods contributes to a strong regional economy, and a better quality of life for the public is crucial for continued growth. Attaining greater mobility involves balancing a multimodal network that integrates all modes and is able to contribute to an efficient network of services, meeting varied transportation needs. Included in this emphasis on mobility is maximizing the operational aspects of existing facilities.

**Environment:** To enhance regional quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities and protect the environment.

Improving environmental quality of our neighborhoods and communities will lead to a sustainable transportation system and economic vitality. This includes finding ways to reduce environmental impacts that could potentially result from a transportation project, as well as promoting environmentally efficient modes of transportation such as transit, vanpooling, car-sharing, bicycling and walking. In addition to reducing impacts, restoring environmental function can also be achieved through transportation projects that correct deficiencies caused by past practices, such as improving barriers to fish passage under roadways.

**Regional Priorities**

- Economic Vitality*
- Preservation*
- Safety*
- Mobility*
- Environment*
- Stewardship*

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**Stewardship:** To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the regional transportation system.

As a regional priority, Stewardship captures the overall function of the regional transportation system in a general sense. One way to ensure Stewardship is implemented equally, is to consider Environmental Justice impacts of transportation projects and the benefits and disbenefits imposed on minority and low-income populations, which have historically borne a disproportionate adverse impact by transportation decision making. Seamless integration of land use and transportation policies is another way to advance Stewardship as a regional priority, as separate actions relating to land use and the transportation system affect each other.

In addition to these six regional priorities, Skagit 2045 also considers project costs and timing in the prioritization of regional transportation projects. These factors may greatly influence the priority of a project for the Skagit region.

The Skagit region will strive to ensure that proposed transportation projects and strategies provide the best value for the least cost, consistent with federal requirements for fiscally constrained planning and Washington state requirements for least-cost planning. The methodology utilized includes an accounting of expected costs and benefits for each project evaluated in Skagit 2045. Evaluation is both qualitative and quantitative, with each project evaluated based on the six regional priorities of the Plan and improvements in travel demand outputs in 2045 for roadway projects that can be modeled. Each project is assigned a priority in the plan, based on how well the project aligns with the regional priorities. Estimated project costs are provided by project sponsors, while

potential environmental impacts are evaluated at a planning level. Finally, least-cost planning is used to support the decision of what projects are fiscally constrained in Skagit 2045 – including all Funded and Planned projects which the Skagit region expects will be funded from 2021–2045 with reasonable revenue estimates – and which projects are instead illustrative, which would be fiscally constrained if additional resources become available. **Section 7** includes further information on the financial balancing included within the Plan and the determination of fiscal constraint.

## Key Corridors

In addition to the baseline improvements and efficiency strategies, Skagit 2045 identifies the need for improvements to existing corridors to address future transportation demands of the Skagit region.

## Regional Policies

Regional policies help guide the Skagit region in implementing the Plan and focus on the six regional priorities, as well as coordination and implementation of projects and programs. Policies includes a mix of strategies and goals, which are summarized in this section. Goals are desired future conditions related to the regional transportation system, and strategies are actions that can be taken to help realize these goals.

## Policies

Policies, goals and strategies were reviewed and checked for consistency with the input collected from the public outreach collected during the Plan development process. As the project progressed and technical analyses was completed, these policies and goals were revised and consolidated to eliminate redundancy, address inconsistencies with technical findings and reflect the regional nature and purpose of the document. Policies, goals and strategies should continue to be reviewed and refined every few years to ensure that they reflect the current vision and anticipated direction of the Skagit region.

**Policy 1: Identify, encourage, and implement strategies and projects that**

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**will maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional transportation system through a cooperative effort with the public, federal government, state and local governments, tribal government, private sector, and other interested parties;**

## **Goals and Strategies for Policy 1:**

- 1.1 Select and build the most efficient mix of modes and facilities based on the need to balance accessibility and demand;
- 1.2 Ensure that modes are interconnected in a manner that best serves the users by identifying missing links and connections, and proposing projects that will provide needed linkages;
- 1.3 Consider strategies that recognize the future densification of urban areas as they grow and mature, while transitioning and connecting seamlessly with rural areas;
- 1.4 Support Skagit Transit and other transit agencies serving the Skagit region in acquiring funding from outside sources to help implement strategies identified in the Plan;
- 1.5 Provide level-of-service (LOS) standards across modes that meet the needs of the user while recognizing the uniqueness of each mode;
- 1.6 Provide for the safety and security of the users on all modes by participating in Washington state and federal programs to increase safety and security, and place an emphasis on projects that incorporate safety and security;
- 1.7 Provide accessibility to the regional transportation system, through user-friendly connections, by ensuring that intermodal facilities are not designed and constructed in isolation. In particular, ensure that urban areas have interconnected opportunities for safe and convenient non-motorized modes;

1.8 Ensure transportation concurrency requirements are met consistent with the Growth Management Act;

1.9 Provide accessibility to the transportation system through timely information by maintaining a regional Intelligent Transportation Systems architecture that includes traveler information as a major component;

1.10 Provide access to the regional transportation system in a manner that balances user convenience with safety and preservation of capacity. This includes developing and implementing access management plans where access issues are, or are likely to become, impediments to the safe and efficient operation of roadways for all vehicles and non-motorized users, within the context of a growing region; and

1.11 Coordinate road construction projects with Skagit Transit to ensure current and future public transportation infrastructure is considered in design and construction.

**Policy 2: Provide a Plan that identifies significant transportation facilities and services that support local comprehensive plans and ensures ongoing evaluation necessary to remain current with local, regional, inter-regional, state, federal, and public needs and requirements, while recognizing the interrelationships within**



Roadway Maintenance on State Route 20



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**the contiguous urban area and areas immediately adjacent to them;**

## **Goals and Strategies for Policy 2:**

- 2.1 Ensure the Plan is up-to-date;
- 2.2 Develop a regional growth strategy that incorporates and expresses the growth management plans of the individual jurisdictions. Consider the regional growth strategy when identifying and selecting projects and programs for funding; and
- 2.3 Establish a Plan amendment process that will accommodate changes in local, regional, state, federal, private sector, and public needs between Plan updates.

**Policy 3: Protect the integrity of the investment in the regional transportation system by encouraging and prioritizing timely maintenance of the system;**

## **Goals and Strategies for Policy 3:**

- 3.1 Monitor the condition of transportation facilities by working with SCOG member jurisdictions to identify critical facilities, develop metrics and establish a data collection program;

- 3.2 Time replacement and rehabilitation of facilities to minimize investment by working with SCOG member jurisdictions to develop a regional pavement management system. Encourage agencies

to evaluate the timing of replacement and rehabilitation needs when proposing capacity improvement projects for the Regional Transportation Improvement Program; and

- 3.3 Ensure that the operation, appearance, and functionality of infrastructure meets users' needs by promoting these elements in project selection processes.

**Policy 4: Facilitate cooperation, coordination and information exchange among SCOG member jurisdictions.**

## **Goals and Strategies for Policy 4:**

- 4.1 Provide a regional forum for interested parties to discuss and coordinate their transportation projects, programs and plans with each other. Consider strategies that recognize the future densification of urban areas as they grow and mature;

- 4.2 Identify sources of funding for transportation planning, programs and projects that will implement the Plan and assist in acquiring needed funds.

**Policy 5: Maintain and implement a participation plan to ensure the early, meaningful, and continuous participation of the region's interested parties in the planning process.**

## **Goals and Strategies for Policy 5:**

- 5.1 Develop a public involvement plan prior to anticipated major Plan updates and implement throughout the planning process to ensure that all interested parties have the opportunity for meaningful involvement;

- 5.2 Ensure a two-way communication process in the Plan public participation process by presenting information in a number and



**Boneshaker Bicycle Festival in La Conner**

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variety of media, while incorporating an appropriate number and variety of feedback methods;

5.3 Time public participation interfaces to provide public input into decisions before they are made and provide decision makers with an accurate assessment of public input;

5.4 Make the public participation process meaningful by considering public comments prior to making decisions; and

5.5 Maintain an ongoing public participation process.

**Policy 6: Consistent with Skagit County Countywide Planning Policies, encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.**

*Background: As noted in Section 3 of this document, Skagit County jurisdictions planning under the Growth Management Act are required to develop a set of Countywide Planning Policies. The policies are intended to help the jurisdictions within the county coordinate their GMA planning efforts. These policies provide an umbrella for all local government planning in Skagit County for jurisdictions planning under GMA requirements. The Countywide Planning Policies for transportation are:*

6.1 Multi-purpose transportation routes and facilities shall be designed to accommodate present and future traffic volumes;

6.2 Primary arterial access points shall be designed to ensure maximum safety while minimizing traffic flow disruptions;

6.3 The development of new transportation routes and improvements to existing routes shall minimize adverse social, economic and environmental impacts and costs;

6.4 Transportation elements of the Comprehensive Plans shall be designed to; facilitate the flow of people, goods and services so as to strengthen the local and regional economy; conform with the Land Use Element; be based upon an inventory of the existing Skagit County transportation network and needs; and encourage the conservation of energy;

6.5 Provisions in Comprehensive Plans for the location and improvement of existing and future transportation networks and public transportation shall be made in a manner consistent with the goals, policies and land use map of the locally adopted comprehensive plan;

6.6 The development of a recreational transportation network shall be encouraged and coordinated between state and local governments and private enterprises;

6.7 Transportation services for seniors and individuals with disabilities shall be provided by public transportation operators to provide for those who, through age and/or disability, are unable to transport themselves;

6.8 Level of Service standards and safety standards shall be established that coordinate and link with the urban growth and urban areas to optimize land use and traffic compatibility over the



Train Monument in Sedro-Woolley

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long term. New development shall mitigate transportation impacts concurrently with the development and occupancy of the project;

6.9 An all-weather arterial road system shall be coordinated with industrial and commercial areas;

6.10 Cost effectiveness shall be a consideration in transportation expenditure decisions and balanced for both safety and service improvements;

6.11 An integrated regional transportation system shall be designed to minimize air pollution by promoting the use of alternative transportation modes, reducing vehicular traffic, maintaining acceptable traffic flow, and siting of facilities; and

6.12 All new and expanded transportation facilities shall be sited, constructed, and maintained to minimize noise levels.

Consistency between the Countywide Planning Policies and Skagit 2045 is an important aspect of the Plan.