Skagit-Island

HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Prepared for the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization • November 2014

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WHAT TRANSPORTATION CAN BE.

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1. Introduction

Across the Skagit-Island region people with special needs, including seniors, people with a low-income, and people with disabilities, face daily transportation challenges. These challenges make it more difficult to run errands, access services, get to and from work, or visit family and friends.

This plan, called the Skagit-Island Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP), was developed by engaging special needs populations in conversations about their needs, documenting existing services, identifying needs and highlighting service gaps. Based on this information, this plan then defines regional priorities and recommends projects for state and federal grant funding.

Addressing both federal and state HSTP requirements, this plan was developed using best practices identified in the statewide HSTP. This includes "listening sessions" at events and other locations with concentrated special needs populations, identification of special needs populations through census data, and prioritization of projects using an objective and transparent methodology.

Washington state has been a national leader on human services transportation planning. In 1998, the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) was created by the state legislature with a mission to direct and promote activities that efficiently use all available state and community resources for special needs transportation, including improved coordination and elimination of cross-jurisdictional barriers between transportation providers. Since then, federal surface transportation programs passed in 2005 and 2012 have required that regions develop a, "unified, comprehensive strategy for public transportation service delivery that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited income, laying out strategies for meeting these, and prioritizing services."[1] This is the third HSTP to be developed for Skagit and Island counties, with updates occurring on a four-year cycle.

The Federal Transit Administration, as well as Washington state, fund special needs transportation services including capital investments, operating support, mobility management and planning grants. In Washington state, these funds are combined and distributed by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) consolidated grant program on a biennial basis.

To be eligible for WSDOT consolidated grant funding, projects must address the needs and gaps identified in the regional HSTP and must be included on the regional HSTP project list. This plan does both, with the regional priority list available in Appendix F.

This planning work, which occurred between June and November 2014, was funded through a WSDOT planning grant and managed by staff from the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG). A special needs transportation committee was created by the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) to oversee and guide the plan; however the RTPO Board maintained oversight and final approval of the plan.

The major components of the plan are summarized in Section 2.

Footnotes:

[1] Federal Register: March 15, 2006 (Volume 71, Number 50, page 13458)

2. Project Methodology

The following sections summarize the steps taken to support each of the key project findings.

Documentation of Existing Services

This work involved documentation of the range of public transportation services currently provided in Skagit and Island counties. These services include fixed-route transit service, dial-a-ride paratransit services, vanpool services and pocket services. It also includes transportation services provided or sponsored by other social service agencies, as well as Medicaid brokerage and long-distance transportation services.

Public Engagement

This plan used a variety of methods to engage and communicate with the public. A special needs transportation committee was formed, made up of a diverse set of stakeholders, from human services providers and transportation providers to tribes and social services organizations. This committee informed and guided the process and helped to engage their customers and the general public.

To directly engage special needs users, "listening sessions" were conducted at existing community events, where the project team could engage the appropriate people in conversation. A total of 210 individuals were engaged at the follow listening sessions:

- Skagit Senior Day in the Park
- Out and About: Persons with Disabilities
- Skagit Project Homeless Connect
- Oak Harbor Senior Center
- Stanwood-Camano Persons with Disabilities
- Skagit County Buddy Walk

To complement the listening sessions, a survey (printed and online) of special needs users was developed to collect information on how their transportation needs are currently being met. A total of 143 surveys were collected. Additionally, in-person user surveys were collected on Skagit Transit paratransit vehicles, capturing feedback from a total of 38 paratransit users.

Needs Analysis

A "needs analysis" was conducted to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by special needs populations. In addition to using public engagement findings, data was collected to identify needs. In order to identify the most common locations traveled to by special needs populations, the project team reviewed information on common origins and destinations. Population demographics data from the US Census Bureau were also evaluated to identify the highest needs areas within Skagit and Island counties.

Emergency Management

The Skagit and Island county emergency management plans were reviewed to ensure they addressed special needs populations. Several action items were recommended.

Technology

The use of technology by transportation providers was reviewed, particularly with relation to how technology can improve communication between transportation providers and customers. This was a recurring trend, especially among paratransit riders.

Identification of Strategies and Activities

A set of strategies and activities were developed from public engagement and the needs analysis. These were based on strategies identified in the statewide HSTP, however adapted and expanded to better address the local context. Strategies capture the high-level priorities, while the activities identify specific actions that can be taken to deliver on each strategy. The finalized strategies were prioritized by the Skagit-Island RTPO and then used to rank regional projects for WSDOT consolidated grant funding.

WSDOT Consolidated Grant Program

This section is intended to be a resource for grant applicants and provides information on the WSDOT consolidated grant program, including a summary of the types of projects eligible for grant funding and the application process.

3. Existing Transportation Services

Public Transit Providers

Skagit Transit

Skagit Transit operates transit service within Skagit County including fixed-route (local and express county connector), paratransit, pocket and vanpool service. Weekday service is provided on all routes, with reduced service on Saturdays and Sundays. Standard bus fares are $1.00, with youth and reduced fares of $0.50.

Fixed-Route and Express Service

Fixed-route service is provided on weekdays between approximately 6 am and 9 pm, and on Saturdays and Sundays between approximately 8 am and 6 pm. On weekdays, service in urban areas comes generally every 30 minutes, with service in rural areas coming generally every hour.

Both local bus service as well as express commuter service is provided, with all buses on those routes ADA accessible. In 2013, local bus service carried approximately 645,000 passengers and express commuter service carried 110,000.

In 2013 Skagit Transit operated 48,000 annual revenue service hours and logged 731,000 annual vehicle revenue miles.

Paratransit Service

Skagit Transit also provides specialized paratransit service for passengers who are unable to get to the nearest bus stop or use fixed-route bus service.

Paratransit service is provided within 3/4 mile of fixed -route transit service with a span of service matching the fixed-route service. Those wishing to use the service must fill out an application to determine if they are eligible for the service. Trips must be pre-scheduled.

In 2013, Skagit Transit provided 55,200 paratransit trips, operated 25,000 annual revenue service hours and logged 280,000 annual vehicle revenue miles.

Pocket Service

Skagit Transit provides pocket service to rural communities not served by fixed-route service. This service, which is available on a specific day(s) of the week, connects riders in rural communities to nearby transit centers where riders can transfer to other routes or access nearby services.

Island Transit Vanpool

This service operates Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm and riders are required to register to use the service. Skagit Transit takes specific trip requests although its ability to meet the requests are not guaranteed.

Vanpool Program

The vanpool program is an affordable, convenient and comfortable way for employees to travel to work. The program is intended for groups of five to fifteen people who commute more than 20 miles each direction. This program works particularly well for employees on a fixed work schedule.

In 2013, there were 127,000 vanpool trips. Vans are not ADA accessible. Vans are leased on a month-to-month basis with Skagit Transit covering insurance for the drivers, riders, and vans, as well as maintenance and operations costs.

Island Transit

Island Transit operates fixed-route (local and express county connector), route deviation, paratransit, and vanpool service throughout Whidbey and Camano Island. Connection to and from the Washington State Ferries are provided, however no weekend service is currently provided.

Island Transit has operated as a fare free system for

Due to financial difficulties Island Transit was forced to reduce transit service starting on September 1st, 2014. The service reductions included:

- Elimination of weekend service
- Suspension of Route 5 and Route 9
- Conversion of Route 8 to a commuter route
- Service every other hour on Route 6.
- Service every hour on Route 10

over 25 years. The reason for this is two-fold. First, fare free systems have been shown to increase transit ridership by reducing the barrier of use, especially for those with limited income.

Second, national research and industry experience has shown that charging fares for small or rural transit systems produces limited operating revenue because the costs to collect and administer a fare program are significant compared to the revenue generated. Therefore, charging a fare reduces ridership while creating little additional revenue for operating the system.

Fixed-Route, Route Deviation and Express Service

Island Transit currently operates 13 routes serving Clinton, Langley, Oak Harbor, Coupeville, Fort Casey, Terry's Corner, Windermere and Shuksan. Regional connections to Stanwood and Mount Vernon are also provided.

Service operates between approximately 5 am and 8 pm on weekdays. Route deviation service follows a regular fixed-route, but provides improved access to destinations like neighborhoods and businesses upon request. Express commuter service is also provided to the Clinton Ferry. Currently no weekend service is provided.

All buses are fully ADA accessible. In 2013, Island Transit provided 1,090,600 trips, operated 59,000 annual revenue service hours and logged 1,755,000 annual vehicle revenue miles.

Paratransit Service

Island Transit provides curb-to-curb paratransit service for ADA eligible persons with a disability who are unable to use the regular fixed-route bus service, due to their disability.

Paratransit service is based upon the same days, hours, and route structure, as the regular fixed-route service and extends 3/4ths of a mile on either side of the fixed-route service. Service beyond this area is provided on a space-available basis.

In 2013, Island Transit provided 64,100 paratransit trips, operated 30,000 annual service hours and logged 391,000 annual vehicle revenue miles.

Vanpool Program

Island Transit provides additional service through their vanpool program. The fees collected cover operating costs including fuel, maintenance, insurance and the capital cost of the vans.

Vanpools are eligible for discounts on Washington State Ferry services as well as preferential loading. Vanpool vehicles are not ADA accessible.

Whatcom Transportation Authority

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) operates fixed-route, paratransit and vanpool services in Whatcom County. County connector service from Mount Vernon connects to local services at Lincoln Creek Park-and-Ride and Bellingham Station.

Shuttle service to Western Washington University is available from Lincoln Creek Park-and-Ride and transfers to frequent Go-Line routes, as well as much of the WTA network, is possible at Bellingham Station.

Community Transit

Community Transit operates fixed-route and paratransit services within Snohomish County in addition to commuter and vanpool service in and between Snohomish and King counties. Skagit Transit and Island Transit provide connecting service to local and express commuter service at Stanwood Station.

Island Transit Bus

Human Services Transportation Providers

A variety of programs offer transportation services in addition to services provided by Skagit Transit and Island Transit. Many of these service providers focus on the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities. Very few are solely transportation providers, with most offering transportation services in conjunction with other social service or volunteer programs.

These providers range from for-profit companies to non-profit organizations and state government agencies.

Some programs directly provide transportation while others sponsor transportation by contracting with, or buying passes/tickets for, other providers. Those that provide transportation utilize paid drivers, agency staff and/or program volunteers to transport passengers.

Human services transportation providers depend on a variety of funding sources including those dedicated to senior services, individuals with disabilities or family support programs. Some funding programs are narrow in scope and limit the population to which they offer rides to and/or the number or trip purposes they can fulfill.

The following provides a summary of the major human service transportation providers in Skagit and Island counties, organized by the clientele they serve.

Seniors

Camano Center

Camano Center provides by-appointment transportation services for seniors to Skagit County for medical appointments, social and health services. Prescription pick-up and delivery, meals on wheels and grocery deliveries are also provided.

Island County Medical Transportation & Volunteers Services

Volunteers provides transportation for medical or other essential needs in addition to grocery trips and household up-keep assistance.

Senior Services of Island County

This group provides meals on wheels to seniors and contracts with the Northwest Regional Council to provide Medicaid trips for seniors.

Island Transit Paratransit Customer

Medical

Disabled American Veterans

The Disabled American Veterans group provides transportation services to the Veterans Administration hospital in Seattle five days a week. Service is provided from Oak Harbor, Mount Vernon and points south and is operated by volunteers.

Northwest Regional Council

The Northwest Regional Council (NWRC) provides Medical Assistance Administration Transportation, which consists of non-ambulance transportation, to all people eligible for Medicaid who have no other means of transportation to covered medical services as well as meals on wheels program.

The NWRC serves as the broker for these services, authorizing and arranging transportation for people in Island, San Juan, Skagit and Whatcom counties. On average, the NWRC contracts 180,000 annual trips. The private brokers used for Medicaid include:

- Beck & Call Concierge Services
- Care E Me, Inc.
- Cascade Ambulance
- City/Yellow Cap
- City Paratransit
- Birch Bay Taxi (red cab)
- Mercy Transportation
- Safe Transportation
- Sound Cabulance
- Western Van Services

Other

Community Action of Skagit County

Community Action of Skagit County provides rides through the Senior & Disabled Volunteer Services Program in addition to providing transit passes and gas vouchers to clients receiving services through the East County Resources Center, Housing and Essential Needs Program, Housing, Critical Needs, Jail Transition and WorkFirst programs. In partnership with Skagit Transit, increased distribution of free bus passes is planned to begin in January 2015.

Goodwill

Goodwill provides free Skagit Transit bus tickets for clients.

Northwest Educational Services District (NWESD) #189

NWESD #189 provides rides to students ages 3-21 as part of their individualized educational program during the school year. The NWESD is able to provide transportation services beyond students, however no additional service is currently provided.

North Sound 2-1-1

North Sound 2-1-1, operated by Volunteers of America, is a one-stop information portal for special needs populations. North Sound 2-1-1 works with callers to identify which transportation services they are eligible for and connects them to those providers. This service is provided within Skagit and Island counties, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Stillaguamish Tribal Transit Service

The Stillaguamish Department of Transportation provides transportation services, which includes demand responsive service as well as vanpool services. This service is offered by the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians to native and non-native individuals who need to travel to native businesses and facilities or other facilities in the northern Snohomish County area. Service is provided weekdays between 5:30 am and 4:30 pm.

State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)

DSHS sometimes provides assistance with acquiring bus passes or gas vouchers for individuals on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Long-Distance Transportation Providers

Washington State Ferries

The Washington State Ferries operates daily service in Skagit County from the terminal at Anacortes to the San Juan Islands and Vancouver Island, with connecting Skagit Transit service.

Ferry service in Island County operates from Clinton to Mukilteo and Coupeville to Port Townsend, which is also served by transit at each ferry terminal. Transit service to and from the Clinton-Mukilteo ferry is a key component of the transportation system as vehicular travel demand on that route exceeds capacity during the peak periods.

Amtrak Cascades

Amtrak Cascades stops in Mount Vernon twice daily in route from Seattle to Vancouver BC, as well from Vancouver BC to Seattle.

Amtrak also runs an afternoon bus between Bellingham and Seattle with a stop in Mount Vernon. Amtrak Cascades service is ADA compatible but requires attendant notification.

Greyhound

Greyhound service is available at Skagit Station in Mount Vernon, with morning and afternoon service to Bellingham, Seattle or elsewhere along the Greyhound route.

There is no Greyhound service in any of the other cities in Skagit or Island counties with the nearest Bolt Bus stop (another service of Greyhound) in Bellingham.

Airport Shuttle Service

Shuttle service to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and Bellingham International Airport is provided by the Whidbey SeaTac Shuttle. Bellair Airporter Shuttle provides service to SeaTac Airport.

4. Public Engagement

Development of a comprehensive and inclusive human services transportation plan requires extensive and varied public engagement. This plan utilized a variety of public engagement methods to capture feedback from a diverse set of stakeholders, including the spectrum of special needs populations such as seniors, people with disabilities and people with low-income.

To engage these special needs populations in the most efficient manner possible, the project team identified existing meetings and events where these groups would already be present.

By bringing the planning process directly to them, the plan's public engagement was very successful and resulted in approximately 210 unique individual engagements. A survey of human services transportation was also developed and distributed, capturing 143 individuals via survey responses.

This approach to public outreach was also mindful of geographic diversity of input from people throughout the study area as well as the needs of Indian tribes.

Listening sessions were held throughout both counties, and a similar planning effort by the Samish Tribe was engaged and integrated with this plan. Transportation providers, including Island Transit and Skagit Transit, non-profit transportation providers, and private transportation providers, were also engaged through creation of an ad-hoc advisory committee, called the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee.

Additionally, health and human services providers, who work with special needs populations on a daily basis, were also engaged through the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee.

Project resources including project documents, meeting agendas and minutes were shared online using the SCOG website.

A public call for projects was issued on September 29, 2014 through public notices in local newspapers, a notice on SCOG's website and an email to a special needs distribution list.

The subsections below provide additional detail on the ad-hoc advisory committee, survey, listening sessions and reference plans.

Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee

In preparation for the HSTP, the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Organization Policy Board approved the creation of the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee.

This advisory committee was structured to include representatives from organizations representing major employers, education/youth, Medicaid/ healthcare providers, transit agencies, tribes, veterans, people with disabilities, people with low-

> *I live alone, clear up near Timber Lake at Hwy 20, a mile from the nearest service, have to get a friend to drive me to the bus stop. I wish there was more service off the scheduled route.*
> *- Senior*

> *[I would like] dial-a-ride [service] that you can take out of town (La Conner, Mt. Vernon)*
> *- Samish Tribal member*

> *I use Skagit Transit. It meets all my needs.*
> *- Homeless man*

> *No evening service makes night event impossible since they can get dropped off but not picked up from events.*
> *- Senior services provider*

Skagit County Buddy Walk

income and seniors. A total of five monthly meetings were held throughout the plan's development.

The committee provided guidance and valuable insight into the needs of the region in addition to contributing a wealth of institutional and historical knowledge about Skagit and Island counties. For example, committee members were vital in the identification of listening session opportunities to connect directly with special needs populations.

The organizations which were involved or invited to participate are listed below.

Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee Members

- Disabled American Veterans, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island
- Opportunity Council of Island County
- Community Action of Skagit County
- Island Transit
- Skagit Transit
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Camano Center
- Northwest Regional Council
- Volunteers of America – North Sound 211
- Northwest Educational Services District #189
- Washington State Department of Transportation

> *"[The] drivers are fantastic. I've never had a bad ride."*
> *– Paratransit rider*

Other Organizations Invited to Participate

- American Cancer Society
- Boy and Girls Clubs of Skagit County
- Catholic Community Services
- Chinook Enterprises
- Community Transportation Association of the Northwest
- Community Transit
- Compass Health
- Developmental Disabilities of Island County
- Developmental Disabilities Program, Skagit County
- Goodwill
- Housing Authority of Skagit County
- North Sound Mental Health
- Samish Tribe
- Sauk-Suiattle Tribe
- Senior Services of Island County
- Service Alternatives
- Skagit Valley Hospital
- Sno-Isle Libraries
- Stillaguamish Tribe
- United General Hospital
- Upper Skagit Tribe
- Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
- Washington Vocational Services
- Whidbey General Hospital
- YMCA-YWCA

Many of the organizations above provided input that assisted in the needs assessment, and provided a comprehensive accounting of human services transportation across the region.

While many of the organizations did not provide transportation services directly, many had input on the state of existing services and specific needs of people they come in contact with on a regular basis.

A few of the contacts to this list of organizations yielded what became two listening sessions with persons with disabilities, one with a Skagit County focus and the other with a Camano-Stanwood focus.

Committee Meetings

A total of five committee meetings were held between July and November 2014. SCOG and consultant staff presented progress updates on the plan, involved and educated the committee on HSTP planning, gathered guidance and engaged the committee on prioritization activities.

SCOG and WSDOT staff also provided information on grant funding opportunities and how they can submit a project for inclusion on the regional prioritized project list of human services transportation projects.

Details of the organizations represented on the committee are provided in Appendix A. The appendix includes details of each agency's mission, what types of services they provide, what they hope to get from the planning process and details about their vehicle fleet and service, if they provide transportation services. A summary of each meeting is provided below with complete meeting summaries also available in Appendix A.

Meeting #1

The kickoff meeting began with introductions including the committee member's name, the agency or group they represent, what they do, what transportation services they offer and what they would like to get out of the HSTP update. The purpose of the committee was discussed, which primarily included guiding the plan's development and prioritization of regional human services transportation projects for WSDOT consolidated grant funding.

An overview of the planning process, was presented including required elements and best practices with details on how the consultant planned to solicit robust public engagement and how a "need index" based on demographics data would be developed and used in the planning process. WSDOT staff then provided an overview of the consolidated grant program as well as the types of projects which are eligible for funding.

Meeting #2

This meeting began with a review of the information collected thus far including census data and committee member data. The consultant presented a draft of the prepared survey and collected feedback from the committee including changes to several questions. The committee also provided feedback on the most efficient ways to distribute the survey and volunteered to help collect feedback through their various channels.

The consultant then led an interactive workshop to identify high-level plan priorities. Based on feedback, it was decided that local priorities would build off those developed in the statewide HSTP due to the completeness of the priorities developed in that plan.

Meeting #3

The meeting began with a review of the existing transportation services chapter including an inventory of all transportation providers. The consultant also presented a draft of the needs assessment. This included a list of needs such as lack of transit service or span of service. Additionally, a draft of the geographic needs assessment was presented to the committee.

SCOG staff then presented an overview of the WSDOT consolidated grant program and led a prioritization exercise to finalize the weighting factors for the priorities identified at the last committee meeting.

Meeting #4

A presentation of the core HSTP components was provided by the consultant. This included presentation of existing transportation services inventory, preliminary public engagement results, the finalized needs assessment, an overview of emergency management, technology and a draft of the strategies and activities.

The committee provided valuable feedback on the draft strategies and activities including additions and changes to ensure that the projects eligible for state funding are included in the HSTP. SCOG staff then led a discussion to determine what ongoing implementation and coordination efforts would be valuable.

Meeting #5

The final meeting of the committee concluded their involvement with the planning process. The committee reviewed the draft HSTP and recommended it to the SIRTPO Policy Board. The committee also reviewed the prioritized list of regional human services transportation projects and recommended it to the SIRTPO Policy Board.

Special Needs Survey

Maximizing the amount of public engagement and input was a key goal of the HSTP. Identical online and print surveys were developed to capture written feedback via multiple channels from special needs populations.

The purpose of the survey was to understand who needs human services transportation, why they are using the service and how well their needs are being met.

The survey results informed the planning process, however, the results are not statistically valid. The population which took the survey self-selected, and therefore may not represent the overall special needs population in Skagit and Island counties.

> *I don't know if I qualify for Paratransit but it would be nice.*
> *– Survey response*

Public Outreach at Skagit County Buddy Walk

While Skagit Transit and Island Transit already have usage data, their data is not directly comparable because it only includes information from users, where as this survey was targeted at both users and non-users of existing transportation services.

The survey was based on one developed by People for People for the Yakima HSTP, and adapted based on consultant suggestions and committee feedback. This included replacing open-ended questions with multiple-choice answers to ease completion of the survey.

A travel training question was added at the suggestion of the committee to identify people that may be interested in learning how to use transit. Reponses to these questions, with information identifying those interested, was distributed to the transit agencies so they could follow-up with survey respondents.

The survey was hosted online and distributed to the public via the agencies and groups involved. Survey responses were collected from August 13th to September 30th, 2014 with a total of 143 surveys completed.

Listening Sessions

A number of listening sessions, which varied in format from hosted meeting to information booths, were conducted throughout the HSTP development. The goal of these sessions was to capture direct input from a full range of special needs populations. This included seniors, people with disabilities and people with low-income.

To maximize community feedback, SCOG and consultant staff took these sessions to the public rather than asking the public to attend an open house specifically for this plan. A summary of each event is included below. Complete documentation of comments collected at each listening session is included in Appendix B.

Skagit Senior Day in the Park

This annual event is a chance for seniors to receive health screenings, hear about product promotions, learn about services offered to them in the community and receive a free lunch. Held on August 14th at Maiben Park in Burlington, this event was the first listening session attended by SCOG staff.

SCOG staff presented a list of potential plan priorities and asked people to put dots next to their highest priorities. They were also asked to fill out a paper version of the survey.

Many participants were not receptive to this approach and found it confusing and difficult for a variety of reasons, including that the language used was overly technical and the type used on materials was too small to easily read. To improve engagement, SCOG staff switched approaches, spoke directly with seniors about what they liked and disliked, noting

> *More service is needed in Skagit County.*
> *– Homeless man*

> *I would use it [the bus] more if it was cheaper.*
> *– Homeless woman*

responses. In total, an estimated 110 individuals were engaged.

Out and About: Persons with Disabilities

On September 10th, SCOG staff meet with the Out and About: Persons with Disabilities support group at the Burlington Library. Ten of the eleven participants were physically or developmentally disabled with the meeting feedback and comments representative of the transportation challenges they face.

The group was well informed about coordinated planning within Washington state and discussed common challenges like getting to and from evening events. The Peer Group Coordinator from the Center for Independence North Sound also provided follow-up comments.

Skagit Project Homeless Connect

Project Homeless Connect is an annual event at which people with low-income and those who are homeless are provided a wide array of health and non-health human services. This includes medical and dental checkups as well as food, clothing, job training and other social services. The event was held on September 11th at Skagit Valley College.

Skagit Transit service was free throughout the day to provide participants a free way to get there. SCOG staffed a booth throughout the day and made contact with approximately 50 individuals.

Project Homeless Connect also provided an opportunity to reach persons with limited English proficiency. Input from four Spanish speakers was translated by an event volunteer and was included in the meeting summary for the event. SCOG staff prepared for this event by reviewing common Spanish phrases in case translation services would not be available.

Oak Harbor Senior Center

SCOG staff conducted outreach to senior citizens on September 5th at the Oak Harbor Senior Center. Throughout the outreach event a total of 24 seniors provided comments with their comments paraphrased and documented by SCOG staff. Comments were generally related to the paratransit systems, including both things that riders liked but also things they did not like.

A major reoccurring theme was how the system is a lifeline for many riders. Multiple comments were also

> *We need more cross-county transit—life goes on beyond Skagit County! If you want good quality medical care, you have to go outside of Skagit County because the good doctors in Skagit County aren't taking any more patients.*
> *– Senior with disabilities*

My clients often don't know how to ride the bus or they don't understand the system... The main reason clients miss their appointments, including medical and opportunities to get free food and services, is lack of transportation.
- Human service provider

I use the SKAT bus but I want to use Dial-A-Ride and the questions about qualifying are too confusing.
- Disabled senior

[I would like] school bus all year to and from work. Only one of us has a license and she works. So it created some difficulties with her at times.
- Samish Tribal member

made about Island Transit's financial and management issues.

Stanwood-Camano Persons with Disabilities

A focus group was held on September 16th at the Stanwood-Camano Community Center. SCOG staff met with seven people, including representatives of Washington Vocational Services and the Camano/ Stanwood Aktion Club, which serves adults with disabilities.

Many comments were received, including comments on the importance of transit service for people with disabilities to get to jobs, the importance of connection between transit agencies (Island Transit, Skagit Transit and Community Transit) in the Stanwood area and the special needs of people with developmental disabilities.

Skagit County Buddy Walk

The Skagit County Buddy Walk is an annual event to promote acceptance and raise awareness of persons with Down Syndrome. This year it was held on October 11th with approximately 250 participants. SCOG staff attended the event, gathered feedback including key travel destinations (work/school, shopping, medical and other), agreement or disagreement with previously collected statements on paratransit and dial-a-ride service and written responses.

Ride-Alongs

Multiple "ride-along" surveys were conducted by Skagit Transit to help identify the successes of paratransit service and to gather suggestions for areas that can be improved. Respondents were asked open-ended questions about how they access the service, what they like about the service, and what aspects can be improved. A total of 38 on-board ride-along interviews were completed. Ride-along survey responses are included in Appendix B.

Reference Plans

Review of past HSTP plans and other regional or local plans can provide valuable context and a fresh perspective on human services transportation. This is because most plans include public engagement and stakeholder guidance on topics that intersect with human services transportation. Reviewing other plans leverages those efforts while also providing a more complete picture of the historical issues and how transportation relates to so many aspects of peoples' lives. Comparison of public feedback from this plan to past HSTPs helps validate the feedback contained in this plan.

Statewide HSTP

The Washington State Department of Transportation developed its first statewide HSTP in 2013 to guide regional HSTP planning efforts and present a clear vision for the future of special needs transportation across the state.

The plan included a greater emphasis on consistency in regional HSTP plan development, more robust guidance on project prioritization, examples of regional and national best practices, added emphasis on performance measures and provides recommendations to improve special needs transportation in Washington state.

Skagit-Island 2007 and 2010 HSTP

The 2007 and 2010 HSTP plans were developed in a similar fashion as the current plan, however less state guidance was available during those times. Since then, the state Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation has developed an HSTP template and WSDOT has developed a statewide HSTP which provides additional structure to this effort.

The 2007 and 2010 plans were used as reference documents, especially in areas where they excelled, including document structure and demographic analysis. They were also helpful points of reference, particularly with respect to documentation of unmet needs and some of the geographic coverage issues present in Skagit and Island counties.

Samish Tribal Transit Plan

The Samish Tribe is currently in the process of developing a tribal transit plan with elements similar to this plan. For example, their plan will include an assessment of current transit options to tribal facilities and a community survey.

Outreach to tribal members has already begun and a list of transit challenges was presented at a September community meeting. They include:

- Lack of regular bus service to the Longhouse
- Need to connect residential and rural areas of Anacortes (Mount Vernon and beyond)
- Expanded transit service hours on weekends
- Additional on-demand service options
- Accessible bus stops
- Improved pedestrian infrastructure and more bus shelters
- Service to match future needs
- Increasing local Samish population in Anacortes
- Future Tribal enterprises

A final plan is anticipated in December 2014.

Skagit Prosperity Report

The Skagit Prosperity Report: A Community Needs Assessment 2013 was developed by Community Action of Skagit County. The plan studies the broad array of needs and resources for low-income people in Skagit County.

The plan identifies transportation as an area of need which is above average in importance but also an area with an above average availability of resources. Transportation was identified as an issue, particularly with respect to employment access for people with low-income. Transportation challenges also included affording gas and insurance.

> *Sometimes I see three busses pass, one right after the other. That's a waste of money. Can't they consolidate stops?*
> *– Senior*

> *I use the bus because sometimes I don't have anyone to take me to where I need to go. I wish it passed by more often—every 30 minutes.*
> *– Translation from Spanish speaker*

> *Most drivers are very courteous; they're like family. If I'm going off the (Whidbey) Island, I have to hunt for a ride. I'm taking beginning computer classes for seniors at the Oak Harbor Senior Center, which is possible thanks to Paratransit.*
> *– Survey response*

5. Needs Assessment

The following section includes a variety of information sources which are used to identify the need for human services transportation. These information sources include a summary of paratransit trip origins and destinations, a demographic profile of Skagit and Island counties, as well as an analysis of high need locations and a compilation of unmet needs.

Development of Unmet Needs

The comments and findings developed through the various methods discussed in this section were consolidated into a findings and comment tracking sheet. This sheet, located in Appendix C, was used to systematically consolidate and summarize the identified unmet needs, which are presented at the end of this section.

Common Origins and Destinations

Anonymous origin and destination (O-D) data provided by Skagit Transit and Island Transit identifies the most frequently visited paratransit service locations, providing a better understanding of the relative travel demand of the most visited locations by paratransit riders.

To compile the O-D information, Skagit Transit and Island Transit paratransit pick-up and drop-off data was compiled and sorted first by county and then categorized by destination type. The raw data provided by the service providers are from June 2010

Figure 1: Group Homes, Senior Centers and Shopping Facilities Paratransit Destinations

Group Homes

Island Transit		Skagit Transit	
Summerhill	10,953	Life Care Center – Mount Vernon	14,880
Careage	8,626	Vintage at Mount Vernon	12,992
Whidbey Manor	7,023	Mira Vista	12,191
Cambridge Cove	6,044	Life Care Center – Sedro-Woolley	7,783
Regency	5,060	Alpine Ridge	7,073
Cambey	4,057	Adult Day Care	6,569
Harbor Towers	3,220	Group Home – Burlington	6,408
Brookhaven	2,774	Country Meadows	5,742
Maple Ridge	2,344	Mountain Glen	5,377
HomePlace	1,827	Group Home – Mount Vernon	5,362
Dean Manor	1,597	Prestige Nursing Home	4,931
		Highland Greens	3,364

Senior Centers

Island Transit		Skagit Transit	
Oak Harbor Senior Center	11,711	Senior Center – Anacortes	6,243
Time Together/Bayview Senior Center	9,787	Senior Center – Mount Vernon	5,223
		Senior Center – Burlington	3,325

Shopping Facilities

Island Transit		Skagit Transit	
WalMart	9,252	Food Pavilion	8,618
Safeway	4,996	Cascade Mall	6,060
Saar's Market	3,687	Walmart	5,899
Payless Shopping Complex	2,506	Fred Meyer	5,557
Albertsons	1,875	Safeway	3,583
Rite Aide	791		
Navy Exchange/Commissary	287		

Source: Skagit Transit and Island Transit, June 2010 to June 2014

Figure 2: Medical Facilities, Religious Facilities and Other Frequent Paratransit Destinations

Medical Facilities

Island Transit		Skagit Transit	
Davita Dialysis	13,726	Mount Vernon Dialysis Center	34,878
Whidbey General North	12,297	Skagit Regional Medical Center	6,907
Kidney Center	12,043	Compass Health	6,605
Whidbey General Hospital	8,181	Skagit Wound Healing Institute	5,596
Whidbey Community Physicians	5,036	Skagit Valley Hospital	3,078
Whidbey General South	936		

Religious Facilities

Island Transit	
Oak Harbor Lutheran Church	314
Christian Missionary of Langley	534
Trinity Lutheran	291
Church on the Rock	146
Family Bible Church	649
St. Augustine's Catholic Church	654

Other Frequent Destinations

Island Transit		Skagit Transit	
Thrive Fitness Center	13,742	Chinook Enterprises	24,236
Island Athletic Club	5,531	YMCA	13,387
Oak Harbor High School	5,217	Ovenell's	6,746
Oak Harbor Library	3,966	Skyline	5,606
American Legion	798	Riverside Health Club	4,643
CMA Church Soup Kitchen	649		
DSHS	571		
Bayview Food Bank	508		
Langley Library	468		
Freeland Library	312		
Oak Harbor Post Office	227		
Coupeville Library	223		
Clinton Library	174		
Opportunity Council	150		

Source: Skagit Transit and Island Transit, June 2010 to June 2014

to June 2014. While all available data provided by Island Transit was used in the analysis, Transfer Center data provided by Skagit Transit was omitted because these trips typically serve as intermediate transfers which could result in double counting trips.

Adult Care Homes/Assisted Living was the most frequented trip destination, representing 28% of the top trip destinations. Medical Centers were the second most frequented destination, representing 21% of the top trip destinations. Of the top medical facility trips, 44% were to dialysis facilities including Davita Dialysis and Mount Vernon Dialysis Center, with Mount Vernon Dialysis Center being the top overall destination in the region, generating nearly 35,000 trips over the last four years.

Paratransit users are also using the service to connect to physical fitness facilities and to employment centers. The top destination in Island County was Thrive Fitness Center, generating nearly 14,000 trips over the same 2010-2014 timeframe. Chinook Enterprises, a private non-profit that provides employment opportunities to persons with disabilities in Mount Vernon, was the second most frequented destination in the region, generating over 24,000 trips.

Public Engagement Findings

As documented in Section 4, an extensive public engagement effort was conducted using online and print surveys, listening sessions, ride-alongs and an advisory committee.

One of the major components of this effort was a public survey. A total of 143 surveys were completed,

Figure 3: I need transportation because:

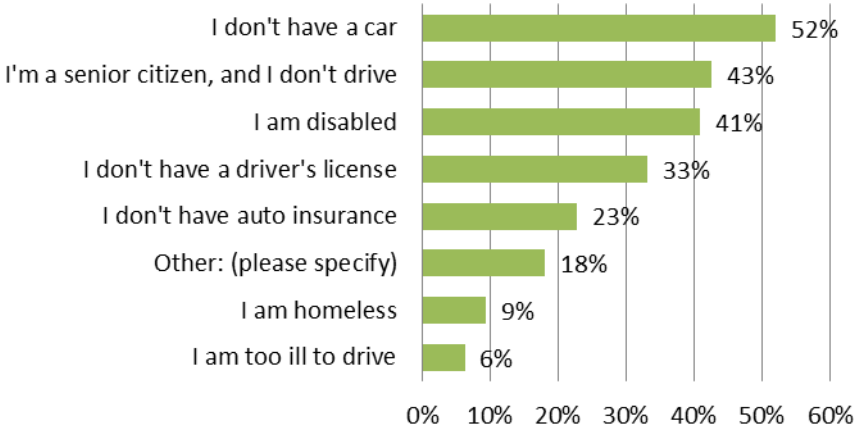


Figure 4: I need transportation to:

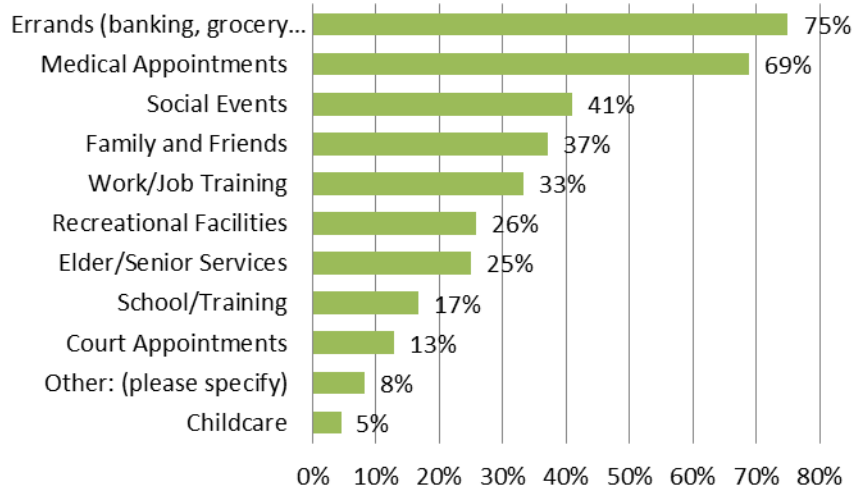


Figure 5: On a scale of 1 to 5 (low to high), rank how current transportation options are meeting your needs:

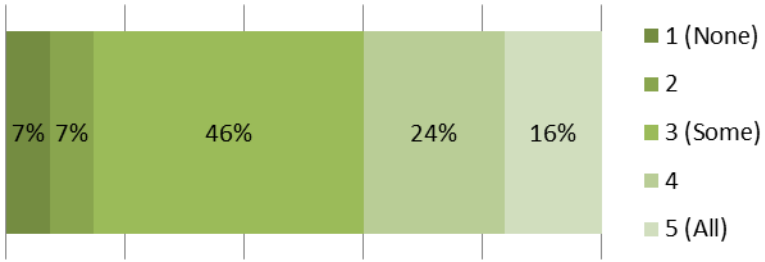
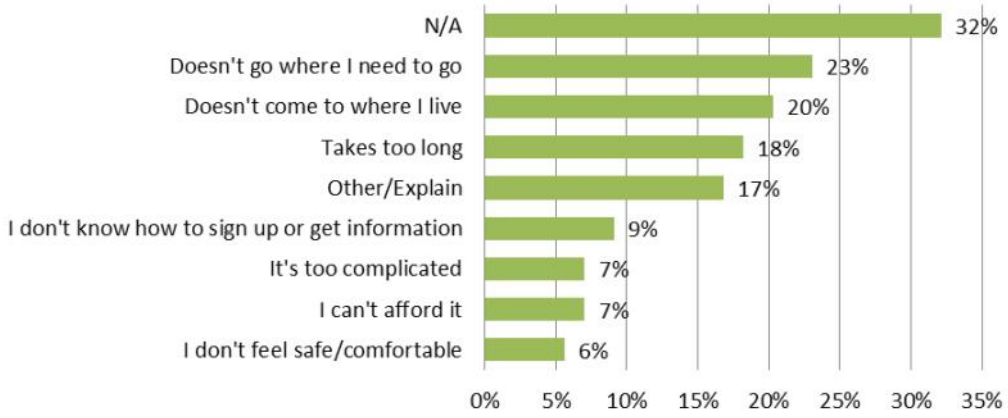


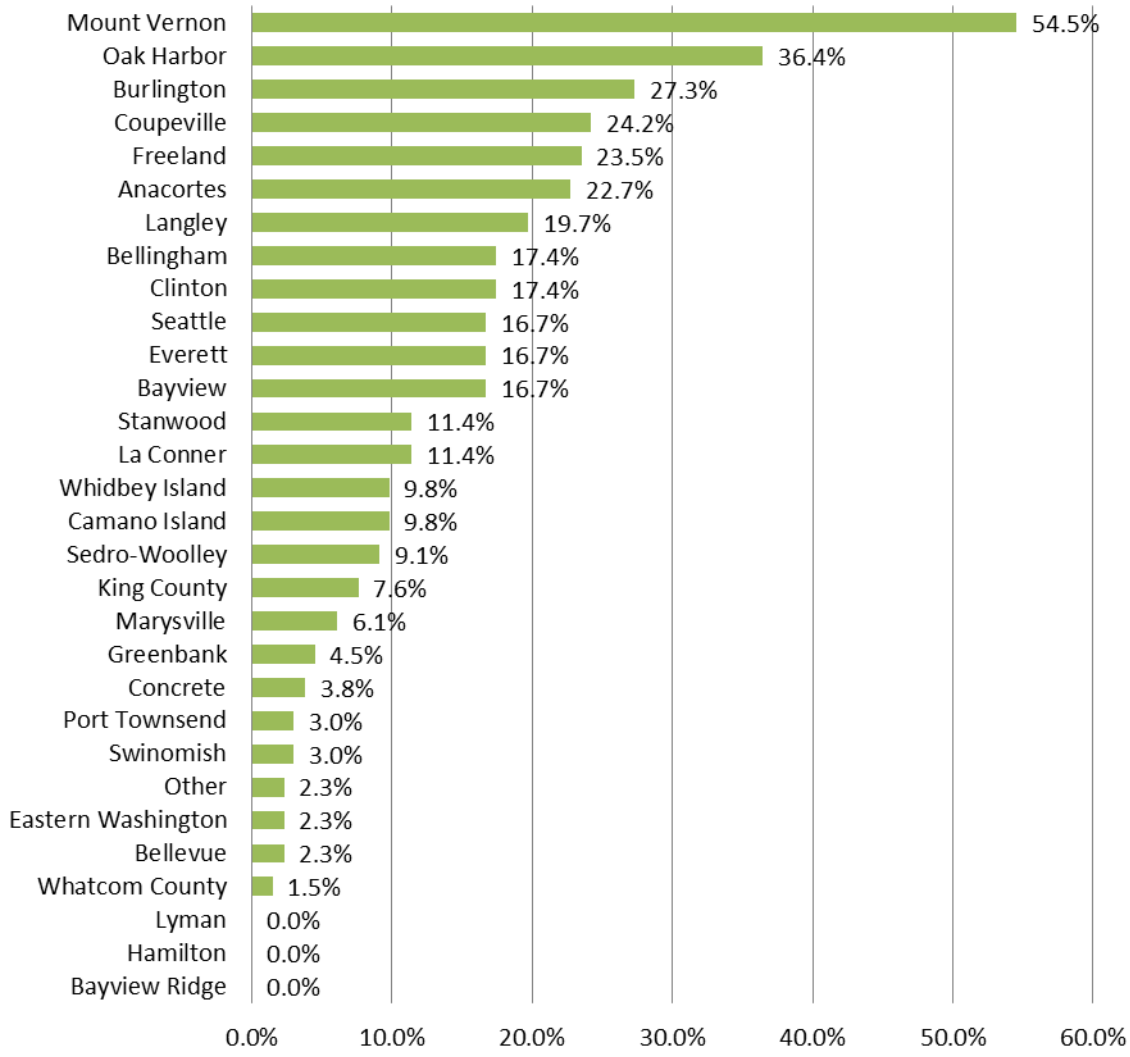
Figure 6: Why don't the existing transportation options meet your needs? (Select all



however some survey questions were left unanswered on a few of the questionnaires. Based on the zip code provided by survey respondents, Oak Harbor, Camano Island, and Langley were identified as the most heavily represented areas. A summary of common responses are listed below with a complete summary of survey responses in Appendix D:

- The single largest reason why people need transportation is because they don't own a vehicle, followed by age and disability. This information informed the needs index analysis.
- Transit is by far the most used means of transportation, however family, friends and volunteers as well as non-vehicular

Figure 7: I need to go to (top three destinations):



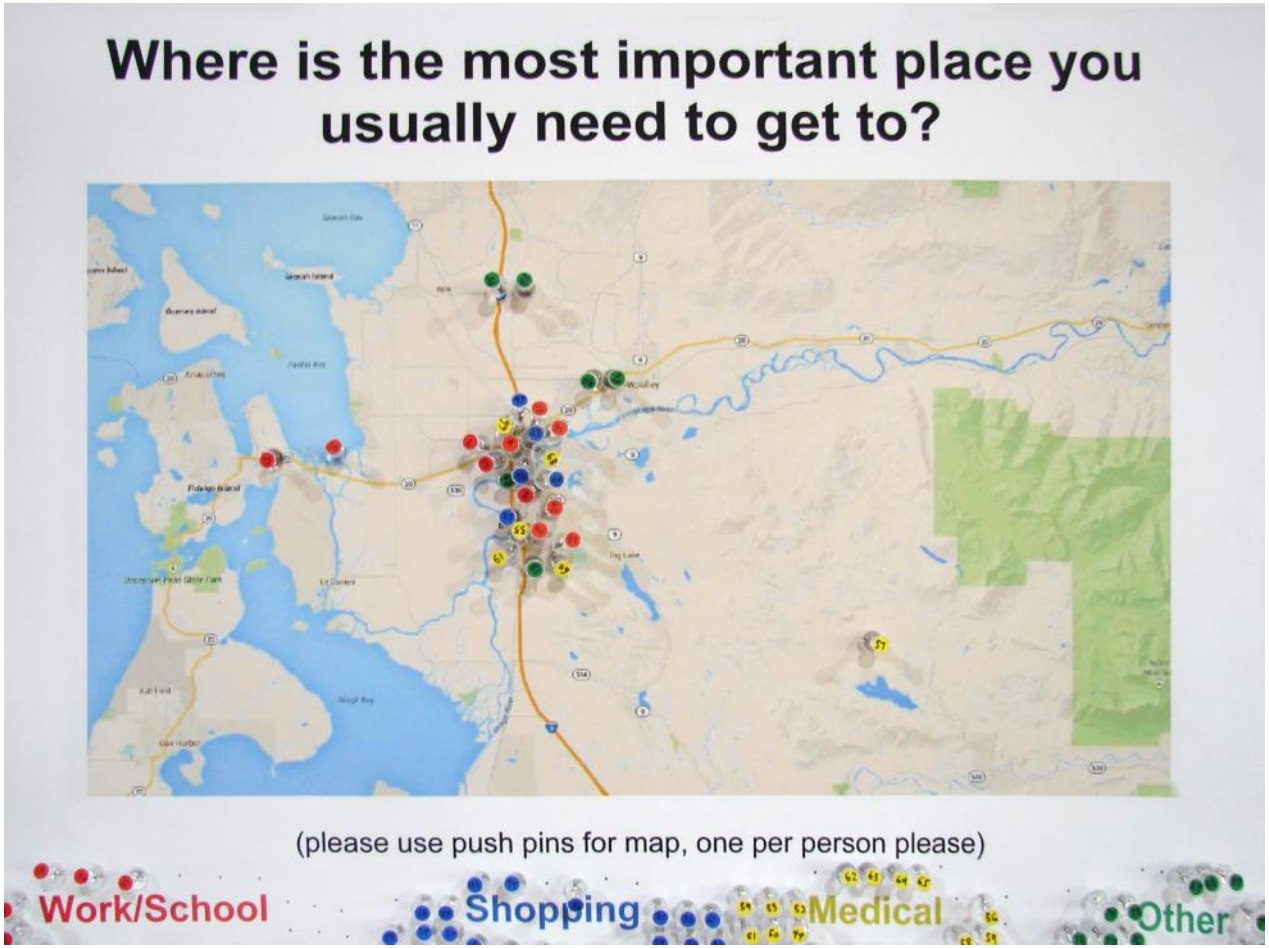
transportation are also key means of transportation.

- Running errands and medical appointments are the most frequently mentioned travel purposes, followed by social events, seeing family and friends, and work or job training. These results align with Skagit Transit and Island Transit paratransit trip data; however the paratransit trip data highlights the importance of locations which are used on a frequent and recurring basis.
- Over half of respondents mentioned Mount Vernon as one of their top three destinations, followed by Oak Harbor and Burlington.
- The vast majority of survey respondents were somewhat knowledgeable to very familiar with their transportation options.
- Nearly half of participants said that some of their transportation needs are being met. An additional 40 percent said that more than some of their transportation needs are being met, while 14 percent of respondents said that less than some of their transportation needs are being met.
- The top two reasons respondents do not use existing services are because it does not go to where they need to go or does not come to where they live. Additionally, 18 percent of respondents said existing services take too long and 9 percent said they do not know how to sign up or get information about existing services.
- Nearly half of respondents said that lack of transportation impacted their ability to participate in community events, meet medical and health needs or accomplish daily tasks.

Special Needs Populations

To help capture feedback from a variety of special needs populations, a variety of events and engagement strategies were used. Generally, each event targeted one of the key special needs populations: seniors, people with disabilities, or people with low-income. A summary of each group's needs are included below.

Public Feedback from Skagit County Buddy Walk



Seniors

- There was a great appreciation that Island Transit is fare-free
- Access to fixed-route transit service can be difficult
- Frequency of service, especially to rural areas, is very limited
- Concern that buses aren't run as efficiently as they could be
- Feeling that the bus system is for commuters, not seniors
- The lack of scheduling flexibility can make it hard to use
- Expanded span of service, including Sunday, would be nice
- Samish Island in Skagit County, and other areas needs transit service
- Not knowing how to ride the bus can prevent seniors from riding the bus
- Paratransit service provided personal freedom and access to community events
- Paratransit operators were very appreciated

Persons with Disabilities

- Personal freedom and job access was a major concern
- Scheduling paratransit service was difficult and required advanced planning
- Return trips, after an appointment for example, could be frustrating because of the long wait, especially if riders must wait outside in bad weather
- Better communication about schedule could make service easier to use
- Transit services end too early to attend some events and appointments

People with Low-Income

- The intake survey for Project Homeless Connect, indicated that 20% of event attendees arrived at the event by bus, 40% drove themselves, 18% walked and 20% carpooled
- People appreciate that Island Transit is free and said that Skagit Transit's fare can present a barrier to some
- Paratransit service is greatly appreciated but can be slow, with return trips hard to schedule
- More frequent service with an expanded service area is needed
- Transit service is a lifeline for some users
- Some riders said they felt unsafe riding on the

bus, either because of the driver or other passengers
- County connector service is important, but more service is needed
- Driving can be easier and cheaper although paying for gas can be an issue
- The span of bus service, especially on the weekend, makes it hard to use the bus to get to/from work
- Pocket service needs to be more frequent and should give people more time to run errands in town
- Lack of transportation is the number one reason people miss human services appointments

Demographic Profile

To understand where special needs populations live, a demographic profile of Skagit and Island counties was developed. This demographic profile draws from 2010 Decennial Census data and 2008-2012, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, which are both data products of the US Census Bureau.

Mapping of the data illustrates where specific high needs populations are concentrated. However, several limitations exist including the large geographic scale of some of the census tracts, particularly in eastern Skagit County.

The clustering or magnitude of special needs populations within these areas can help guide decision-making by maintaining or directing additional resources to those areas with high need. The data contained in this profile focuses on four special needs populations: people age 65 and over, people with disabilities, people with low-income and households without a vehicle. Combined, there is a total population of 200,700 among the two counties, with 122,200 in Skagit County and 78,500 in Island County.

Figure 8: Skagit and Island County Demographic Data

County	Population (1)	Age 65+ (2)	Poverty (1)	Disability (1)	No Vehicle (1)
Skagit County	122,200	18,900 (15.4%)	25,900 (21.2%)	15,100 (12.3%)	2,000 (1.6%)
Island County	78,500	14,400 (18.3%)	12,400 (15.7%)	9,700 (12.3%)	1,200 (1.5%)
Total	**200,700**	**33,300**	**38,300**	**24,800**	**3,200**

Source: (1) 2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2008-2012), (2) 2010 Decennial Census

Skagit County has the highest poverty ratio between the two counties, with 21 percent of the population falling at 150 percent of the poverty level; while Island County has 16 percent. Skagit County has 43,700 more residents than Island County, so 21 percent also represents a larger number of people. Persons with a disability account for 12 percent of the population in both counties again with a larger total number of people in Skagit County. Poverty data was compiled using 2008-2012, 5-year ACS data while disability data is from 2010 Decennial Census data.

Data summarized by county and demographic type is shown in Figure 8.

The statewide HSTP reviewed the same demographic measures on at a statewide level by county. This analysis helped to identify counties with either a large total special needs population or a large special needs population relative to the countywide population. Skagit and Island counties did not place in the top 25% percentile for any of the above measures in the statewide HSTP.

These measures are indicators of the population who rely on human services transportation. Maps illustrating the census data for these population groups are available in Appendix E.

High Needs Areas

A needs assessment, using the census data previously identified, was conducted for census tracts in Skagit and Island counties to determine which geographic areas have the greatest need for human services transportation. Census block group data was aggregated to the census tract level and data for the two counties was combined to produce a Composite Need Index, which was then used to display the Proportional Need and Density Need throughout Skagit and Island counties.

Methodology

The previously summarized demographic data, which is representative of populations that rely most on the human services transportation system, was used for this analysis. These demographic measures are consistent with the previous 2010 Skagit-Island Human Services Transportation Plan as well as grant funding streams used by the Washington State Department of Transportation.

To determine which census tracts have the greatest need for human services transportation, a Composite Need Index score was developed using the four demographic measures summarized above. First, the Composite Need Index score was calculated by multiplying each demographic measure by a criteria weight. The criteria weights were as follows:

- Age 65+ – 20
- 150 percent below poverty level – 20
- Disability – 25
- No Vehicle – 35

These criteria weights were established based on initial survey feedback and previous human service transportation planning experience. The larger the weight, the more "need" the demographic measure has on the Composite Need Index.

Next, the Composite Need Index was used to calculate the Proportional Need Index and Density Need Index results. These two measures were calculated because each measure captures a different aspect of the overall need picture:

Proportional Need Index: This measure identifies areas with a large special needs population relative to the total population of the area. This was calculated by dividing the Composite Need Index by the total population of the area. This helps to identify areas where need is greater than would be expected based on total population.

Density Need Index: This measure identifies areas with a high density of people with special needs. This was calculated by dividing the Composite Need Index by the total size of the area. This measure identifies areas where a large concentration of people with special needs live.

Census tracts scoring within the top 25 percent of both measures were mapped in Figure 9 on the next page.

Findings

The analysis shows that needs are distributed throughout Skagit and Island counties, with both the proportional and density need index measures indicating overlapping high need in areas of Anacortes and Oak Harbor. This shows that compared to other census tracts and block groups these areas have both a higher proportion of need as well as a higher density of need.

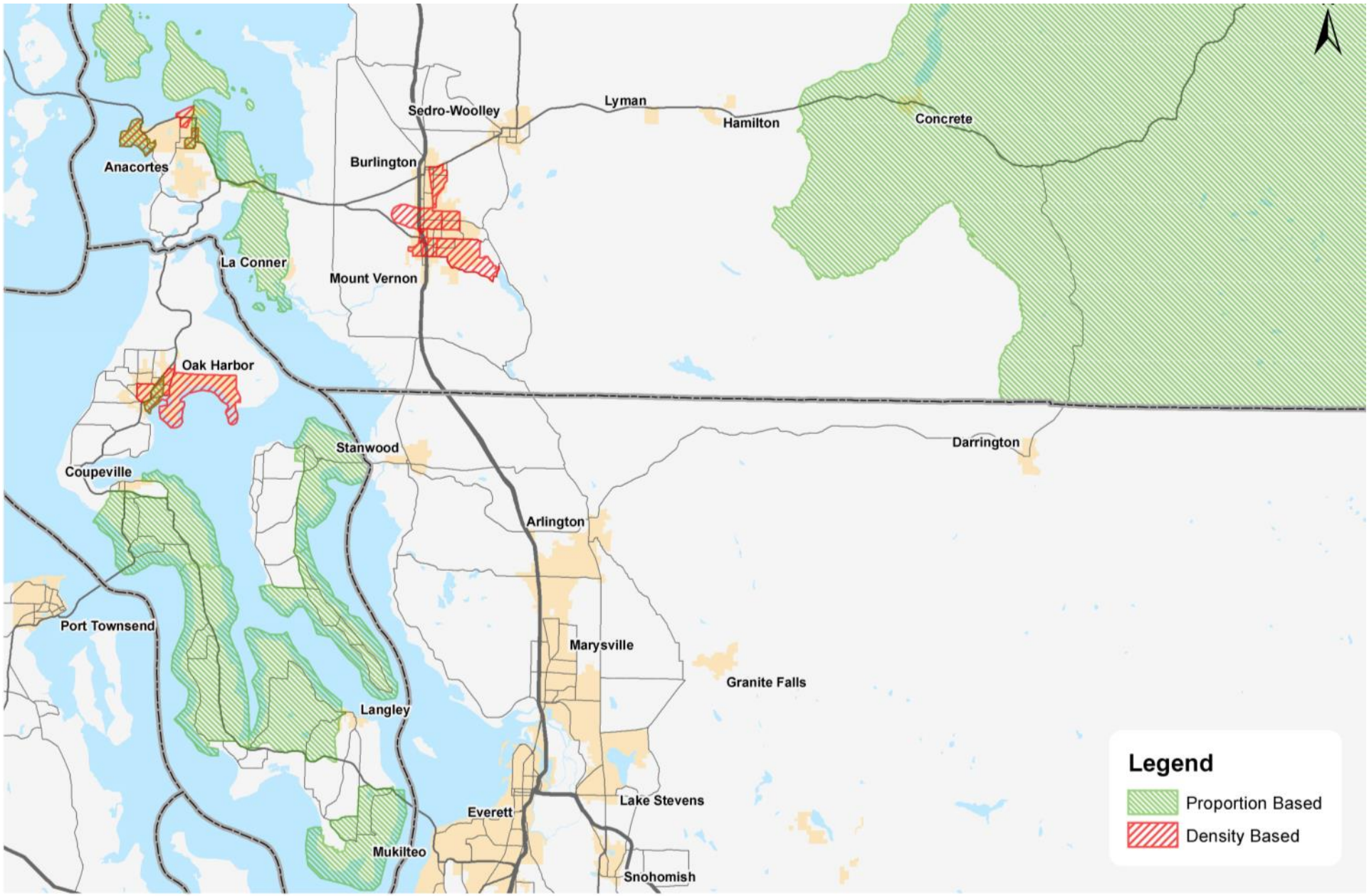
Taken individually, the index measures also provide helpful information. The proportional need index indicates high need on many of the largely rural Island County communities of South Whidbey Island and East-South Camano Island in addition to East Skagit County, the Swinomish Indian Reservation and Guemes Island. In addition to parts of Anacortes and Oak Harbor, Mount Vernon and Burlington are also identified as areas with a high density of need.

Unmet Needs

Based on public engagement (surveys, listening sessions, and ride-along), committee discussions, and a review of past HSTP and other related plans – a range of unmet needs were identified. The strategies and activities identified by this plan, and ultimately the projects prioritized for WSDOT consolidated grant

County Connector Service

Figure 9: Human Services Transportation Need Index (Census Tract in Top 25%)



Source: 2010 Decennial Census (Population 65+) and 2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2008-2012 (No Vehicle Household, People with Disabilities, People of Low-Income)

funding, were developed to address these unmet needs.

Below is a list of areas in which current services were identified as not meeting needs.

Maintain System

- Existing transportation services are not meeting all needs. About half of the survey respondents said that the current system is meeting some of their needs, with 15 percent saying it met less than some of their needs and 40 percent saying it meets more than some of their needs.
- Maintaining existing transit service and restoring suspended or cut service was broadly identified as a key need, especially in Island County.

Increase and Improve Service

- Increasing service levels was broadly identified as a need, especially among existing riders. Areas which were identified as high needs areas include:
  - Anacortes
  - Mount Vernon
  - Burlington
  - Oak Harbor
  - South Whidbey
  - East-South Camano Island
  - East Skagit County
  - Swinomish Indian Reservation
  - Guemes Island
  - March's Point
- Extending the span of service during evenings and weekends was identified as a very common need, especially among those who need to get to and from work or rely on human service transportation to get to and from community or social events.
- Increased system coverage including fixed-route, paratransit and pocket service was identified by a cross section of users as a need. The following areas were specifically mentioned:
  - South Whidbey
  - Guemes Island
  - Samish Island
  - Stanwood
  - Sedro-Woolley
  - March's Point
- Improved connections and coordination between transit/ferry service in Skagit County and Island County, including tribal reservations, and to regional destinations like Bellingham, Everett and Seattle were identified. This included both better connections to service and improved frequency of county connector service. This was mentioned more frequently by those in Anacortes and in Island County.
- Improve on-time reliability of fixed-route service.

Increase Access

- The cost of public transit in Skagit County and other transportation options can be a cost burden for those with low-income.
- Accessing fixed-route service can be difficult and unsafe, particularly for those in rural areas.
- Bus stop facilities are minimal with few stops providing weather protection and seating. This was particularly mentioned by paratransit riders.

Improve Coordination and Communication

- Providing more information about services and how to ride, particularly for those who may be eligible for paratransit service or do not have internet access.
- While paratransit service is greatly appreciated, scheduling of service is inflexible and requires a significant amount of advanced planning. This was a very common comment from paratransit riders.
- Real-time bus location information would make it easier for passengers to use services.

6. Emergency Management

During emergencies, people who rely on the human services transportation system may still need transportation services, particularly if they are required to evacuate or leave their home. To prepare for emergencies Skagit and Island counties have created plans that identify key agencies, their roles, communication channels and responsibilities through their departments of emergency management .

To ensure that human services transportation providers are part of the emergency planning work, state planning guidance requires that emergency planners are made aware of the HSTPs developed by agencies within their jurisdiction. Skagit Transit and Island Transit have already been engaged in local emergency comprehensive planning efforts, with a summary of the emergency plans currently in place below. Upon adoption of this plan, SCOG will contact local emergency planning staff, make them aware of this plan, and communicate the importance of continued engagement.

Skagit Transit

Skagit Transit has a defined role in two emergency management plans. The Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan developed by the Skagit County Department of Emergency Management identifies Skagit Transit as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) member. The plan calls for Skagit Transit to support transportation coordination efforts including the movement of persons with special needs, including in the case of evacuation.

In this role, Skagit Transit acts as a support agency with guidance from other agencies at the EOC. The plan also identifies Skagit Transit as a resource to help provide a damage assessment throughout the county. The specifics of this coordination are clearly laid out in an interlocal agreement signed in September 2007 between Skagit Transit and Skagit County.

The second plan, developed by the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program, includes emergency closure of I-5 and other major highways. In the long-term, increased transit service or new transit service provided by Skagit Transit was identified as a response strategy.

Island Transit

Two emergency management plans were identified for Island County. The first, which was prepared by the Island County Department of Emergency Management, identifies Island Transit as an EOC participant with responsibility for transportation coordination.

The second plan, developed by the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program, identifies scenarios in which land connections to Whidbey or Camano Island are destroyed. This plan also identifies Island Transit as an EOC participant with responsibility to provide increased or new transit service to ferry terminals.

While these plans exist, no interlocal agreement or memorandum of understanding has been developed between Island Transit and Island County. State guidance suggests that such an agreement be developed to ensure mutual and clear understanding of Island Transit's role, abilities and responsibilities during an emergency.

7. Technology

Advances in technology, particularly around Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL), Computer Aided Dispatch and Traveler Information Systems have given transit providers new tools to better operate, plan and manage their bus fleets. The deployment of technology in the transportation sector is broadly categorized as Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). Implementation of ITS, which Skagit Transit and Island Transit have already used to varying degrees, helps improve the efficiency of operations, ease of use, safety and quality of experience for transit riders.

Using ITS to improve communication with riders was a common theme identified during public engagement. Rider information such as real-time bus location or arrival information available through an application or on a kiosk was a common request. This information helps reduce anxiety for riders when transferring between buses or between the bus system and Washington State Ferries. It also helps riders deal with transit services delays or know if they have missed their bus.

Below is a summary of existing and planned ITS projects by Skagit Transit and Island Transit. WSDOT has developed a statewide ITS architecture plan which includes a list of potential future ITS investments, including ITS investments in transit.

Skagit Transit

The information below was developed and documented in the Skagit Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) ITS Architecture Plan which was approved in December 2011.

Existing Technology

- Vehicles used for demand responsive service have AVL systems
- Security camera systems on all buses
- Security monitoring systems at Skagit Station, South Mount Vernon Park & Ride and other locations

Planned Projects

- No projects in the Skagit MPO ITS Architecture Plan are currently planned

Potential Projects

The following projects were identified as potential future projects:

- Installation of AVL systems on all buses for improved schedule adherence tracking and real -time information
- Monitoring abilities at all park and ride locations and stations
- Dissemination of real-time information about schedules and vehicle locations to the public
- Coordinate trip planning and information with Washington State Ferries, Whatcom Transportation Authority, and other regional agencies
- Installation of information kiosks
- Electronic information at transit stops and stations
- Develop transit trip planning tools
- Have the ability to collect electronic fare/ passenger information
- Develop transit signal priority systems with local jurisdictions

Island Transit

The information below was documented in the Island Transit ITS Inventory which was compiled in September 2014.

Existing Technology

- All fixed-route and paratransit vehicles have AVL with Mobile Data Terminals
- Video monitoring at:
  - Harbor Station Transit Center
  - Oak Harbor
  - Prairie Station Transit Park (Coupeville)
  - Noble Creek Transit Park (Langley)
  - Whidbey Island Park and Ride (Clinton)
  - Freeland Park and Ride
  - Transit Maintenance Facilities (Camano Island and Coupeville)
- Radio over Internet Protocol to improve radio communication (in progress)
- Trip planning through Google Maps

Planned Projects

- No projects are currently planned or included in the WSDOT ITS Architecture

Potential Projects

The projects below have been identified as potential future projects based on the Island Transit ITS inventory.

- Expanded video monitoring at Bayview Park and Ride, North Oak Harbor Park and Ride and Terry's Corner Park and Ride
- Real-time security audio and video streaming from buses
- Development of a trip planning app
- Installation of real-time bus location information kiosks at major transfer points and potentially development of a smart phone app
- Installation of in-bus automated stop announcement system and reader board

Closed Circuit Surveillance Camera

8. Strategies and Activities

A key deliverable of this plan, the strategies and activities identified below, were developed through an iterative process which included integration of the needs analysis, distillation of public engagement and input from the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee. The strategies and activities form a shared regional vision of how to improve human services transportation in Skagit and Island counties, including the investment priorities which are used to score and rank projects.

The committee provided early recommendations for each of the strategies, activities and priorities, with the SIRTPO Policy Board adopting their recommendations with some modifications.

Strategies identify the desired high-level priorities of the HSTP, with activities focused on actionable steps that can be taken to advance the associated strategy. The activities included below are commonly used by transportation providers to improve their service and address issues faced by special needs riders.

However, these activities should not be viewed as the only options available to address the intent of each strategy. Additional guidance is available in Section 9.

To complete the application process for WSDOT consolidated grants, applicants must show how their project addresses the identified strategies. The extent to which a project addresses these strategies will determine how high it scores as a regional funding priority.

Project prioritization and WSDOT consolidated grant funding occurs every two years, with HSTP updates completed every four years. Because of this offset schedule, the project prioritization methodology and priority project list are detailed separately in Appendix F, allowing an easy mid-cycle update to the project priorities in 2016.

Identified Strategies and Activities

The HSTP strategies ("S") and activities ("A") are included below.

S1 Preserve Existing Services: maintain or restore existing service levels and vehicle fleet

A1-1: Fund operations of existing or restored service

A1-2: Maintain and/or replace bus fleet to ensure a state of good repair

A1-3: Maintain and build adequate capital reserves to fund fleet replacement

A1-4: Conduct planning and other support tasks necessary to maintain service

S2 Expand Services: increase service levels

A2-1: Increase coverage of service

A2-2: Increase span of service (weekends and evenings)

A2-3: Increase frequency of service

S3 Address High Need Areas: provide service to areas scoring high in human services transportation need index

A3-1: Maintain, restore or expand

County Connector Route 80X

transportation services in high need areas

A3-2: Work with communities in high needs areas to identity gaps and how best to meet needs

S4 Improve Regional Connections: improve cross-regional connections

A4-1: Increase span, frequency and capacity of service

A4-2: Improve schedule integration between systems

A4-3: Cooperatively operate or fund cross-jurisdictional service

S5 Increase User Knowledge: increase knowledge of available transportation options to targeted users

A5-1: Improve user knowledge among special needs populations

A5-2: Leverage existing communication tools to better inform the public of transportation options

A5-3: Increase public knowledge of travel training programs

A5-4: Ensure agencies, groups and communities who support special needs populations are well informed

S6 Improve Existing Service Timeliness: improve quality of timeliness of service

A6-1: Track on-time performance of routes and identify solutions

A6-2: Make changes such as increased schedule padding to improve timeliness of service

S7 Utilize Existing Services: improve utilization of existing transportation services

A7-1: Improve access to service through investments in bus stops, ADA equipment and bicycle equipment

A7-2: Reduce financial barriers to access through a voucher program

A7-3: Continue to improve schedule coordination with different modes and service providers

S8 Expand Driver Training: promote driver training to encourage "compassionate professionalism"

A8-1: Maintain driver training standards

S9 Improve Provider-User Coordination: improve coordination between transit service providers, human services providers and users

A9-1: Plan and implement mobility management projects

A9-2: Host periodic (annual or quarterly) meetings between transit providers and human services providers

S10 Utilize Technology: utilize technology to provide improved efficiency and user access to mobility options

A10-1: Improve rider information using real-time information systems

A10-2: Implement and utilize radio systems and computer-aided dispatch to improve scheduling efficiency

A10-3: Improve rider information and trip planning tools

A10-4: Improve driver and rider safety through security investments on buses and at stops

S11 Inform Users of Mobility Options: assist human service providers in guiding users to the most efficient mobility options

A11-1: Provide travel training for fixed-route and paratransit service

S12 Improve Provider Regional Coordination: improve coordination between regional and cross-regional transit service providers

A12-1: Modify or add human service or transit service to ensure both services can be provided in concert

A12-2: Coordinate county and city public works investments in transportation infrastructure to support access to and from transit service

A12-3: Encourage siting of human services and housing for special needs populations near existing fixed-route transit service

S13 Promote Innovation: promote innovative programs, processes and tools that improve efficiency and reduce cost

A13-1: Utilize social media and mobile workshops to engage special needs populations

S14 Promote Environmental Sustainability: incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into regional coordinated transportation planning and services

A14-1: Reduce fleet emissions through increased fleet efficiency and/or alternative fuel source vehicles

S15 Leverage Funding: further leverage available funding

A15-1: Develop funding partnerships to fund projects using a variety of sources other than the WSDOT consolidated grant program

Prioritization of Strategies

While all of the identified strategies are important, some are of higher importance than others. This dynamic was captured by assigning weighted factors to each strategy, with higher values assigned to more important strategies.

Weights were developed by the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee using a "budgeting" approach, with a total of 100 points allocated among the strategies. The weighted factors were then

reviewed by the Skagit and Island sub-RTPO policy boards and finalized by the SIRTPO Policy Board.

The finalized weighted factors are included in Figure 10. These factors are used to prioritize projects based on which strategy or strategies they satisfy.

Coordination and Implementation

Ongoing coordination and project implementation are some of the key goals of the HSTP. Better communication and coordination between special needs populations, human services providers, transportation providers and other related parties was agreed upon as a valuable outcome from the HSTP work.

Based on suggestions from the Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee, a "menu of options" for continued coordination and implementation were identified. They include:

- An online forum which could provide an avenue for committee members to keep abreast of ongoing efforts, coordinate and provide input
- Mobility Managers – which other counties use as a way to improve communication between organizations on an ongoing basis
- Monthly group meeting – which other counties utilize to coordinate on issues
- Designate a north Puget Sound mobility manager, rather than a county level mobility manager, which would be valuable in helping address cross-county coordination challenges
- Hold an annual transportation forum, which could provide updates on progress and reconvene the advisory committee organizations

Future Steps

Using this menu of options the SIRTPO Policy Board, Skagit-Island Special Needs Transportation Committee, stakeholders, and elected officials can determine which, if any, of the above options are appropriate next steps for the region.

Major future work items required for continued eligibility of WSDOT consolidated grant funds includes an updated prioritized project list in two years and an updated HSTP in four years.

Continued regional coordination and project implementation can strengthen this ongoing effort, improving human services transportation in Skagit and Island counties as well as improving competitiveness for the next grant funding cycle.

Figure 10: Prioritized Strategies and Weights

Implementation Strategies	Weights
S1 Preserve Existing Services: maintain or restore existing service levels and vehicle fleet	15
S2 Expand Services: increase service levels	15
S3 Address High Need Areas: provide service to areas scoring high in human services transportation need index	15
S4 Improve Regional Connections: improve cross-regional connections	15
S5 Increase User Knowledge: increase knowledge of available transportation options to targeted users	10
S6 Improve Existing Service Timeliness: improve quality of timeliness of service	5
S7 Utilize Existing Services: improve utilization of existing transportation services	5
S8 Expand Driver Training: promote driver training to encourage "compassionate professionalism"	5
S9 Improve Provider-User Coordination: improve coordination between transit service providers, human services providers and users	5
S10 Utilize Technology: utilize technology to provide improved efficiency and user access to mobility options	5
S11 Inform Users of Mobility Options: assist human service providers in guiding users to the most efficient mobility options	5
S12 Improve Provider Regional Coordination: improve coordination between regional and cross-regional transit service providers	5
S13 Promote Innovation: promote innovative programs, processes and tools that improve efficiency and reduce cost	5
S14 Promote Environmental Sustainability: incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into regional coordinated transportation planning and services	5
S15 Leverage Funding: further leverage available funding	5

9. WSDOT Consolidated Grant Program

The Washington State Department of Transportation distributes federal and state grant funds though a consolidated, biennial grant funding cycle. This HSTP will inform grant funding for the 2015-2017 and 2017-2019 funding cycles. This system simplifies the grant application process, allowing applicants to apply for multiple grant funding sources with a single application every two years. This also improves WSDOT grant funding flexibility which helps ensure that available funds are fully utilized. The WSDOT consolidated grant program distributes funds competitively from:

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Programs Section 5310, 5311, 5316 and 5317
- State Rural Mobility Program
- State Paratransit/Special Needs Program for nonprofit organizations

Deception Pass

Details on grant applications including application process, project ranking and deadlines are provided in Appendix F and on WSDOT's website.

Program Goals

The consolidated grant program is part of Moving Washington, an integrated, multimodal approach to transportation planning. Key investment principals include maintaining the transportation system, ensuring safety of the traveling public and investing in cost-effective solutions (operate efficiently, manage demand, add capacity strategically).

Specific goals of the consolidated grant program include:

Address Deficiencies – Encourage communities to identify and address deficiencies in paratransit/special needs or rural public transportation.

Provide a Community Benefit – Assist local areas with determining community benefits and support for paratransit/special needs or rural public transportation.

Preservation or Enhancement – Provide funding to preserve or enhance paratransit/special needs or rural public transportation where there is a demonstrated need and measurable benefit.

Community Connections – Support a sustainable network of transportation services within and between communities.

Financial Partnerships – Establish opportunities for collaboration among local jurisdictions, regional organizations, private sector agencies, state and federal governments, and tribal governments. Ensure stakeholders have a voice in project development. Encourage appropriate cost sharing for projects.

Support Coordination and Multimodal Development – Local organizations are required to coordinate services with other transportation providers in their area, as well as other organizations potentially able to use or purchase the services. Organizations are encouraged to consider all modes/forms of transportation beyond traditional sources to enhance the effectiveness of their services.

Maintain Fleets – As part of Governor Inslee's Results Washington, WSDOT has been given the goal of maintaining the percentage of transit vehicles in the state that are within their minimum useful life.

Eligible Projects

A variety of project types are eligible for grant funding including operating assistance, capital projects, mobility management projects and planning projects. New projects are required to have at least a 5% local match, or 10% match, for continuing projects. Federal

grants require large local match ratios, however in some situations, in-kind contributions can be counted toward the local match. WSDOT's consolidated grant application provides specific guidance on local match requirements. WSDOT guidance on eligible projects is reproduced below:

Eligible Operating Projects

Operating assistance consists of activities and services directly provided or purchased by the applicant. Project funds may be used for expenses such as labor, supplies, fuel, etc. Operating grant funds cannot be used for the depreciation of vehicles purchased with federal or state dollars, or for costs associated with expenses incurred during timeframes outside of the grant period (such as prepaid insurance coverage). Examples of eligible operating grants include, but are not limited to:

- *Operating assistance for rural public* transportation services
- *Operating assistance for paratransit/ special needs transportation services*
- *Feeder bus service for the intercity network*
- *Equipment to assist with mobility management activities*

Chuckanut Park and Ride

Eligible Capital Projects

All equipment purchased through the consolidated grant program must be used to provide the passenger transportation services outlined in the project application. Examples of eligible capital projects include, but are not limited to:

- *Purchasing buses, vans, and other passenger service vehicles*
- *Refurbishing existing passenger service vehicles*
- *Retrofitting vehicles for wheelchair lifts*
- *Replacement parts for passenger service vehicles*
- *Radios and communications equipment*
- *Computer hardware and software, including dispatching software and data systems*
- *Equipment needed for new technologies, through innovative and improved products, for public transportation that enhances operations, mobility, and access*
- *Other equipment such as bicycle racks and fareboxes*
- *Pre-owned or used wheelchair-accessible, passenger-service vehicles (only if it is clearly identified in the application)*
- *Bus shelters*
- *Maintenance equipment (such as bus lifts*

and specialized diagnostic tools)
- *Security equipment*

Eligible Mobility Management Projects

Mobility management describes projects that assist special needs populations maintain a quality of life by connecting them to vital services through outreach, information and education, and working to break down transportation barriers for special needs populations. These funds may be used to support salaries and administration of mobility management programs and staff, develop, and/or purchase educational and outreach materials, and support information sharing. Examples of mobility management projects include, but are not limited to:

- *Planning and coordination and/or policy work addressing critical gaps in special needs transportation*
- *Supporting travel training programs*
- *Programs providing information and/or education about special needs transportation*

Eligible Planning Projects

Planning projects consist of planning, coordination, or other activities to address the needs of the applicant and/or the community they serve. Examples of eligible planning projects include, but are not limited to:

- *Local or regional marketing plan for special needs or rural public transportation*
- *Development of a local or regional coordination plan*
- *Agency financial and operating plan*
- *Comprehensive Transportation Plan*

Project Ranking

Based on the priority projects identified by the Skagit-Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization Policy Board, projects are assigned a letter grade of A, B, C, or D. The top five projects will receive an A grade, the second five will receive a B grade and the third four will receive a C grade. The remainder of projects coming from a region will receive a D grade.

Here are the additional percentile points projects receive through the regional process:

A – Top 5 Projects (Additional 50 points)
B – Second 5 Projects (Additional 25 points)
C – Third 4 Projects (Additional 12 points)
D – Remaining Project (0 percentile points added)

When projects are evaluated at the statewide level, they can receive up to 100 points. The maximum score any project can receive is 150 points, which would occur if the project received 100 points through statewide scoring and also received an “A” in the regional ranking process, giving the project an additional 50 points.

The statewide evaluation consists of an evaluation committee which is given a random sample of projects submitted across the state. The committee then conducts a forced-pairs analysis whereby each project is compared with every other project in the random sample. This head-to-head comparison of projects allows evaluators to create a prioritized project list based upon how well each project fares when compared directly to other projects.

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