



# Section 1 Executive Summary

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The **Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan** (Skagit 2045 or Plan) is a multimodal long-range plan that establishes the strategic framework for meeting the Skagit region's existing and future transportation needs. Developed through extensive coordination with affected jurisdictions and public input, Skagit 2045 provides a "tool box" to facilitate cooperation and maximize resources to jointly select transportation projects and programs for regional funding and implementation through 2045.

Serving as the link between local jurisdictions' transportation plans and the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP), Skagit 2045 was developed to be consistent with applicable federal and Washington state requirements. This level of cross-cutting consistency from the federal all the way to the local level, ensures projects are eligible for funding through the widest range of programs available.

Skagit 2045 also provides regional context for emerging challenges facing the Skagit region, and other challenges that the Skagit region shares with other areas in Washington state. Not all of these challenges are related to immediate needs, as some out to the year 2030 and beyond, but there are regional examples of implications that are occurring today due to funding limitations for maintenance and preservation. Examples of challenges highlighted in the Plan include:

- A mismatch between funding necessary to maintain and preserve the regional transportation system in a condition acceptable to the traveling public;
- Funding challenges to improve fish passages and comply with a federal injunction to remove fish barriers by 2030, which applies to the Washington State Department of Transportation in the Skagit region and areas outside of the region; and

- Necessary and high-cost replacements to ferries serving the Anacortes Ferry Terminal, and replacement of the terminal itself.

These challenges are not unique to the Skagit region, and addressing them will require Washington state and federal funding decisions recognizing the continued limitations in local funding capacity to fund projects and programmatic needs at a massive scale. While these are regional challenges, solutions will need to come from outside the Skagit region to address them.

Along with these challenges, opportunities are presented to better utilize transportation assets, restore ecological function, reduce emissions and provides solutions to congestion challenges by making operational improvements to use roadway capacity wisely. Specific examples of opportunities include:

- While replacing ferries in Anacortes, operated by Washington State Ferries and Skagit County, ensure new vessels are either all electric or diesel-electric hybrid, reducing or eliminating emissions;
- Restoring Chinook salmon and steelhead runs in the Skagit region by removing culverts and replacing them with fish-passable structures;
- Providing a new maintenance, operations and administration for Skagit Transit that allows for expanded transit capacity in the Skagit region and neighboring regions, and better positions this transit agency to respond to emergency management incidents;
- Making roadways safer for all users by utilizing countermeasures – such as roundabouts, bicycle lanes and pedestrian walkways – that reduce conflict points and lessen severity of collisions;

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- Implementing solutions on Interstate 5 that provide technological advances to reduce congestion, without adding general purpose travel lanes; and
- Expanding access across the Skagit River by adding another bridge in Mount Vernon, with associated improvements in vehicular mobility, non-motorized access and emergency management.

## Scope of Plan Update

Skagit 2045 is an update to the previous plan it replaces and supersedes, called the Skagit 2040 Regional Transportation Plan, which was adopted in March 2016 and amended in March 2017. The new Plan is narrow in scope, representing a decision early in the planning process to ensure that the Plan maintains its federal compliance to update the Plan by March 2021, while also continuing to abide by Washington state requirements.

Significantly, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) changed the focus of transportation planning at the national level, moving to a new performance-based approach. The approach provides for more consistency and accountability for how federal transportation funds are being spent across the U.S. Regulations implementing MAP-21 introduced many changes in what is required for a metropolitan transportation plan. Skagit 2045 is the first version of a metropolitan transportation plan in the Skagit region to encompass these new MAP-21 aspects into the Plan.

The scope of work for the Plan update was approved by the Transportation Policy Board of the Skagit Council of Governments in April 2020. Since that approval, the planning process commenced and has continued into early 2021, with a target Plan adoption date of

March 17, 2021. Further information on the scope of the Plan update, along with Washington state and federal requirements applicable to Skagit 2045 are included in **Section 2**.

## Agency Collaboration and Regional Priorities

Skagit 2045 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.

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 (See **Section 4** for definitions of each priority). These priorities are as follows, in no particular order:

- Economic Vitality;
- Preservation;
- Safety;
- Mobility;
- Environment; and
- Stewardship.

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

- The planning process used for the Plan;
- New approaches to public involvement in utilized;

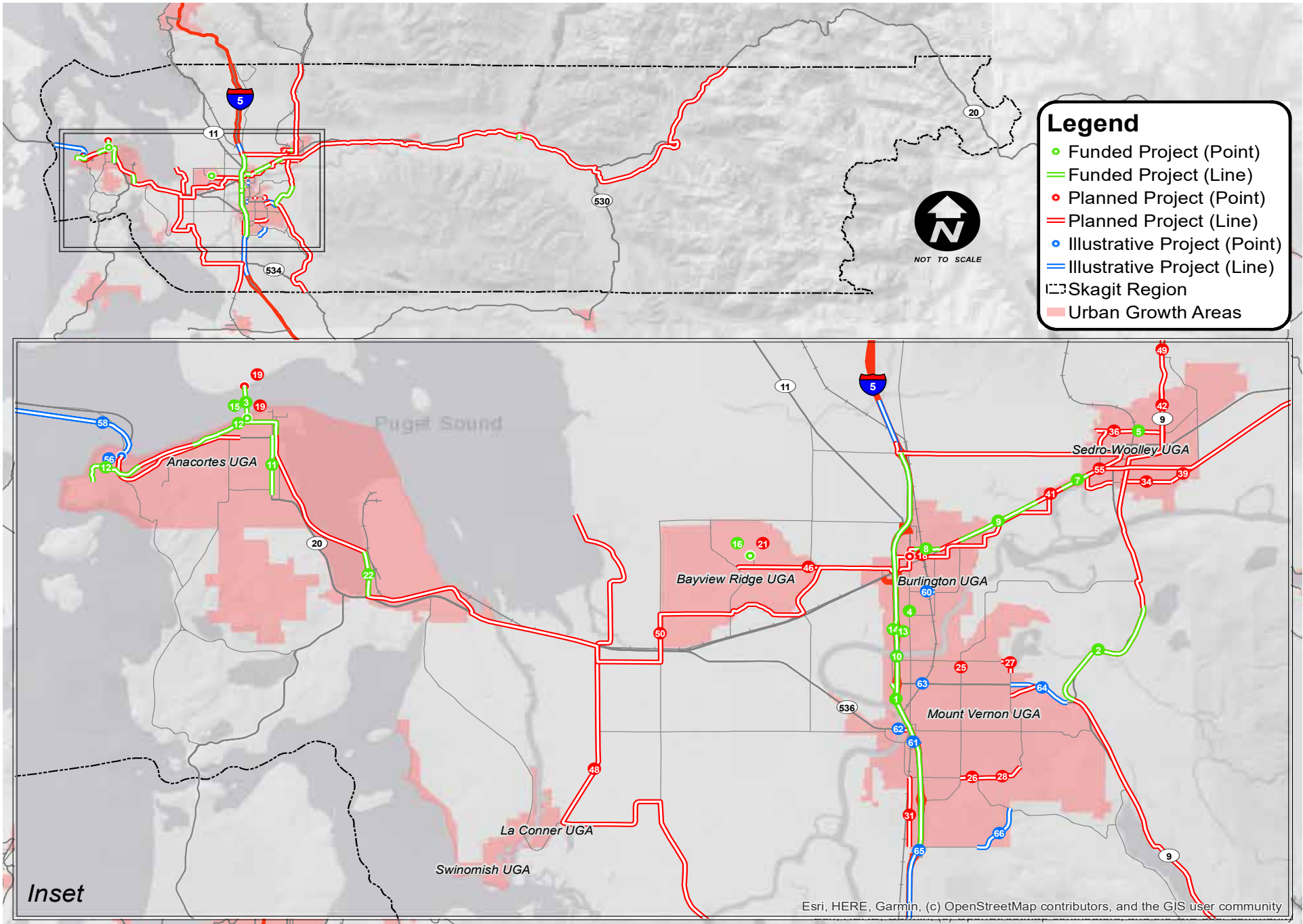


Exhibit 1-1 Regionally Significant Transportation Projects

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- Relationships between the Plan and other plans and programs;
- Expected Environmental Justice impacts from Skagit 2045 projects;
- Regional system performance across five categories of federal performance measures;
- Prioritized transportation strategies and improvements;
- Opportunities for environmental protection and restoration;
- Tradeoffs associated with funding constraints; and
- Long-term transportation challenges and opportunities for the Skagit region.

Over the next 25 years, the Skagit region is expected to grow by over 46,000 people and 18,000 employees. This growth will present new challenges to the region's transportation system, notably significant traffic congestion forecast to occur on Interstate 5 through Mount Vernon and Burlington.

Skagit 2045 highlights the intricate relationship between land use activities and transportation, as well as the importance of coordinating planning efforts on all levels. It also presents land use issues at a local level, recognizing the unique differences and challenges between the Skagit region's many jurisdictions.

Estimates of future transportation revenues are projected to be short of funding needs of agency improvement projects and programs identified in Washington state, and local government transportation plans for the regional transportation system. Spending on maintenance of the current transportation system in the Skagit region is expected to require 80–90% of forecast revenues from 2018–2045.

The difference between the available funding and costs of identified improvement projects and programs requires a regional approach to setting priorities and strategies for addressing transportation needs. To guide the development and funding of the regional transportation system, Skagit 2045 establishes priorities, policies, goals and strategies.

The pyramid diagram on the next page depicts the relationships between local, regional and state plans and how the level of detail increases with local transportation planning efforts. Though this diagram provides a simplified graphic of what can be complex

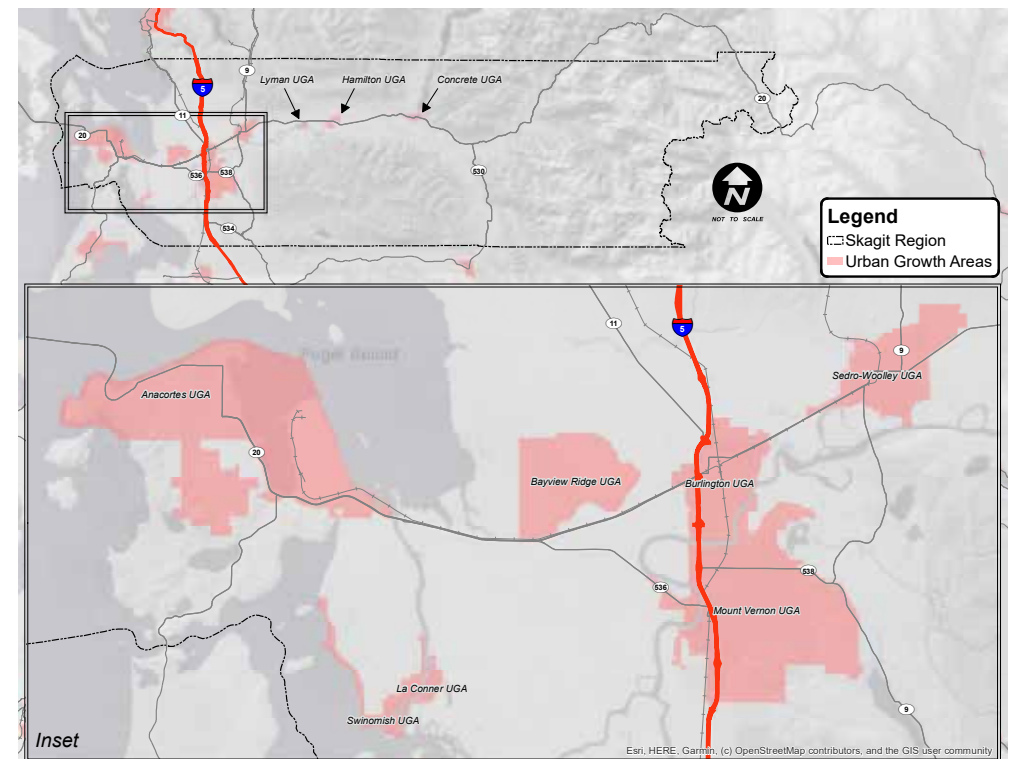


Exhibit 1-2 Skagit County Urban Growth Areas

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relationships between different scales of plans, it is intended to convey that the information base and local attributes relevant to a local plan must be distilled somewhat at the regional level, and then again from the regional to state level. State plans best highlight and prioritize issues statewide that would relate to the Skagit region and other regions, while local plans provide locally defined visions of communities, often down to the parcel level. Skagit 2045 considers these local plans in a broader, regional context, and provides a bridge to large-scale statewide plans.

## Transportation Projects and Programs

Skagit 2045 includes a regional list of state highway projects, state ferry projects, transit agency projects and local government projects. The lists were generated with input from the Technical Advisory Committee, and include a wide range of small- to large-scale projects. Types of programs and projects include interchange improvements, new road segments and road widening, ferry terminals and vessels,

transit facilities and non-motorized separated pathways. **Section 5** includes a listing of each project with associated maps, planning-level cost estimates, project timeframes and relative priorities. All projects included in Skagit 2045 were proposed by owners of transportation facilities and/or member jurisdictions of SCOG. Information for each Planned and Illustrative project is included in **Appendix A**, along with a description of how regionally significant project determinations are made by SCOG.

State highways and ferries serve as the backbone of the regional transportation system, and as a result, many of the priority projects in Skagit 2045 also serve to strengthen and support the Washington state transportation system. Due in large part to funding constraints and better utilization of current transportation assets, in the future there will be continued emphasis on maintaining and improving the efficiency of existing systems, with fewer capacity expansion projects and new roads.

## Environmental Constraints

Skagit 2045 identifies the potential for improvement projects to have significant environmental impacts. The analysis in **Section 6** focuses on state highway, transit and local government projects that significantly add to the footprint of roadways by adding capacity to the regional transportation system. The environmental constraints analysis for the Plan is not intended to identify specific environmental impacts of transportation projects included in Skagit 2045, nor is it used in determining environmental mitigation. Instead it is a planning-level initial review of projects that are often many years or decades into the future, and is by the Skagit region to understand potential issues that may affect implementation or costs of transportation projects. Analysis of specific direct and indirect impacts, and potential mitigation measures, occur as individual transportation projects and programs

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are further defined and evaluated through federal, state and local review processes.

## Financial Constraints

Federal regulations for metropolitan transportation plans, and state regulations for regional transportation plans, require a financial analysis to show how the transportation improvements and programs can be implemented with reasonably expected funds. In addition, these regulations provide for the identification of additional potential revenues that could be generated to fund more projects.

The financial analysis for Skagit 2045 is based on historical trends for revenues and expenditures in the Skagit region, and current rules and regulations controlling transportation funding programs. Estimates are used to establish a likely range of revenues for regional transportation projects, with all revenues and costs evaluated in terms of their “year of expenditure” using inflation rates. This accounts for the differences in the growth of project costs versus revenues over the 25-year time frame of the Plan. For example, the cost of roadway construction in a project in 2021 would be less than construction of the same project in 2030. Year-of-expenditure estimates account for the year a project is planned to be built, and adjusts anticipated costs to that future year.

## State Highways and Ferries Funding

Approximately \$60 million in desired state highway capacity improvement projects have been identified in the Skagit region through Skagit 2045, using 2020 constant dollars. All of the WSDOT projects identified in the Plan are high priority projects. A \$50 million project to address forecast traffic congestion on Interstate 5 is a high priority, but is considered illustrative in the Plan, as it is outside of what the region reasonably expects to be funded during Skagit 2045’s timeframe.

State highway funding is appropriated by the State legislature and approved by the Governor. Historical Washington state spending may not be correlated to future spending. The Connecting Washington Act, which was signed into law in 2015, provided funds for the Sharpe’s Corner Intersection Improvements project on State Route 20 in Skagit County. This project was completed after the Skagit 2040 plan was adopted in 2016.

Washington state also plans to replace six ferries now serving the Anacortes – San Juan Islands route with new vessels during the timeframe of the Plan, along with a terminal replacement in Anacortes. Together, these projects are estimated to cost over \$1 billion, using 2020 constant dollars.

## Funding Implementation

The federal metropolitan transportation planning statute requires that the metropolitan transportation plan include a fiscally-constrained project list. The fiscal constraint requirement is intended to ensure that long-range transportation plans reflect realistic assumptions about future revenues, and provide reasonable expectations about how far those revenues will stretch in paying for transportation projects.

Roughly \$2.8 billion is forecast for Skagit 2045, using 2020 constant dollars, for transportation revenues available to the Skagit region over the planning horizon. The identified expenditures in the Plan for the same timeframe are estimated to be \$3.7 billion, representing a shortfall of approximately \$900 million. To address this difference, several funding strategies are discussed in Section 7 that jurisdictions may utilize to generate additional funds for transportation improvements.