

# **2020–2021 UPDATE TO THE SKAGIT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS METROPOLITAN & REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

## *Public Involvement Plan*

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315 South 3<sup>rd</sup> St. Suite #100  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

## 1.0 Overview

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) were authorized in 1990 as part of the state Growth Management Act to ensure local and regional coordination of transportation plans, among other duties. The RTPO for Skagit County is the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG). SCOG is a voluntary organization of local and tribal governments that works to foster collaboration and cooperation in Skagit County.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and RTPO for the Skagit County region, SCOG is charged with developing and maintaining the Skagit County Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Plan (Regional Transportation Plan or RTP). The RTP is a long-range plan for meeting existing and future transportation needs within the region, and also provides a collaborative process for identifying transportation projects for funding and implementation over the next 20+ years.

The current RTP was adopted in 2016 following extensive coordination with the public, jurisdictions and key stakeholder organizations. Federal requirements that relate to the RTP ensure that it must be updated every five years, at a minimum. In 2020, SCOG began leading the process to update the RTP. The updated RTP is scheduled to be adopted in early 2021, following a public comment period.

SCOG anticipates doing a major update of the RTP in 2025–2026, when data from the 2020 Census becomes available. The scope of this 2020–2021 RTP update is narrow, with the incorporation of new federal transportation planning requirements and content tracking regional progress under the federal performance measures.

### *Project Timeline*

A project timeline, or “project schedule”, has been developed for the 2020–2021 RTP update. The following is a condensed version of the schedule:

- March–August 2020: RTP update process begins with data collection, population and employment forecasting, and travel demand modeling
- June–August 2020: Revising regional priorities, policies and goals
- September–December 2020: Updating financing and transportation project prioritization
- Early 2021: Releasing draft RTP and beginning public comment period

*(See Appendix A for the full project schedule with tasks, dates and anticipated actions throughout 2020 and into 2021)*

## 2.0 Purpose

This public involvement plan provides a detailed description of anticipated public outreach activities and methods for engaging members of the community and other interested parties as part of the process to update the RTP.

### *2.1 Primary Outcomes for Public Involvement*

Guiding the development of the public involvement plan are several primary outcomes that are sought to inform, consult and involve the public in the RTP update planning process. The primary outcomes are as follows:

- Generate broad public understanding of the RTP, including:
  - The purpose of the RTP and what it includes;
  - Why the RTP is important;
  - Why the RTP needs to be updated;
  - The process to update the RTP, including how transportation projects are identified and selected; and
  - What the scope of the updated RTP will include.
- Ensure public awareness of the various ways to obtain information about the RTP update, and clearly explain the topic areas for which public feedback is requested
- Provide numerous opportunities for meaningful public feedback and input on key topic areas, such as the list of priority transportation projects
- Clearly communicate information about the planning process in all materials prepared for the RTP update

### *2.2 Messages to Communicate*

The messages below are intended to provide general information about the Regional Transportation Plan, and the process to update it. These messages are presented as answers to general questions, and can be used to inform the development of project outreach materials, including, but not limited to, web content, fact sheets, display materials and talking points. The messages are presented as the following questions and answers:

- **“What is the Regional Transportation Plan?”**
  - The RTP is a long-term plan that helps identify and prioritize future transportation needs in the Skagit County region
  - The RTP addresses roads and highways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, freight and more
  - The RTP includes a list of regional transportation projects as well as analysis of potential funding options and potential environmental impacts of projects
  - The RTP leads to the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods
  - The current RTP looks out to the year 2040; the update will look out five years further, to 2045
  
- **“What Is the Process to Update the Regional Transportation Plan?”**
  - In accordance with state and federal requirements, the RTP must be updated every five years
  - The process to update the current RTP update began in 2020 and must be completed by March 2021
  - A draft of the updated RTP will be published in early 2020, and will be available for public review and comment before adoption
  - The Skagit Council of Governments is coordinating with local, state, tribal and federal jurisdictions to review and update the current RTP
  
- **“What Regional Transportation Projects Are Included?”**
  - The RTP will estimate revenues and expenses for the regional transportation network out to 2045, including costs to maintain the existing infrastructure, indicating how much funding will likely be available for future transportation projects
  - A project prioritization methodology will be developed to prioritize projects for estimated available funding
  - Limited funding will require tradeoffs and some projects may be unaffordable, based on future financial estimates

- **“How Do I Provide Input?”**
  - The public will have numerous opportunities to provide input as part of the process to update the RTP
  - A variety of methods will be employed to gather input and reach out to those who may not otherwise be involved in helping to plan the region’s transportation future
  - Input can be provided at any time by contacting key project team members in Appendix B, either by phone or email

### *2.3 Input Solicited*

The topics below are intended to provide a context for the type of public input solicited from public engagement activities. These topics take the form of questions, which inform the development of participatory activities, surveys, and other outreach materials. Example questions are included below:

- **Given current funding levels and future projections, do you accept the expected level of service for the transportation system?**
- **What changes are needed to provide you with an acceptable level of service?**
- **Which transportation improvements would you prioritize for the Skagit region, and why?**

## *3.0 Interested Parties*

SCOG seeks to provide meaningful, continuous involvement to the entire public, including every interested party, as the RTP is updated. Methods employed to engage different participants will be tailored to unique venues and formats. A number of targeted parties have been identified for outreach, due to varying identified roles and interests in the regional transportation system. Information will be provided to those Spanish speakers with limited English proficiency, as appropriate, to facilitate an inclusive planning process.

### *3.1 Interested Parties for Public Involvement*

SCOG will target the general public for outreach, utilizing methods in the Activities section (Section 4) as appropriate. Through the planning process, reasonable opportunities to participate will be provided to: limited English proficiency speakers; representatives of public transportation users and employees; freight shippers and those offering freight transportation services; public ports; private providers of transportation; representatives of persons with disabilities; non-motorized representatives; and other interested parties. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, engaging members of the general

public will likely necessitate implementing remote or virtual communication strategies. Many of the traditional engagement strategies used in past RTP updates can be adapted or modified to fit current social distancing guidelines, such as meeting through remote or virtual meeting platforms.

### *3.2 Interested Parties for Consultation*

Additional outreach will be done to specific parties to meet federal consultation requirements, especially parties with identified interests in environmental activities included with the RTP and overall development of the plan. These parties include federally recognized Indian tribes, and federal, state and local agencies with responsibilities in land management, wildlife, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, historic preservation and regulation.

Federally recognized Indian tribes that will be consulted include: (1) the Samish Indian Nation; (2) the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community; (3) the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe; and (4) the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe. Additional federally recognized Indian tribes may be consulted as appropriate.

Federal agencies that will be consulted include the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Both the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service manage federal public lands in eastern Skagit County. Additional federal agencies may be consulted as appropriate.

State and local agencies that will be consulted include the members of SCOG, and other agencies, that have responsibilities for growth planning, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations and freight movements. Additional state and local agencies may be consulted as appropriate.

### *3.3 Limited English Proficiency and Environmental Justice*

Through a previous demographic analysis of Skagit County, SCOG has identified a significant number of Spanish-speaking residents with limited English proficiency. Thus, certain public outreach materials will be made available in Spanish, and Spanish interpretation services will be provided as requested. Minority and low-income populations are also present in the region and will be targeted for outreach as appropriate.

## **4.0 Activities**

Due to social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional public involvement activities such as attending already planned events, venues, and meetings may not be feasible for this plan update.

Under the Washington state [“Safe Start” reopening plan](#), public gatherings of certain sizes and types of travel are restricted. As of July 8, 2020, Skagit County continues in Phase 2 of the reopening plan. During Phases 1–3 of reopening, in-person activities such as

information booths at public events, briefings at in-person meetings, and in-person workshops are unfeasible. These in-person activities may become feasible if Skagit County enters Phase 4 of the “Safe Start” plan during the planning process, although this is considered unlikely. Remote activities may be used at any point in the reopening process, and are expected to be heavily utilized for this RTP update.

Table 1 illustrates identified outreach activities, the manner in which they are conducted, and the feasibility of conducting these activities in person or through remote means and social distancing under the “Safe Start” plan. Descriptions of activities are included in the following sections.

**Table 1: Outreach Activities and Feasibility for Social Distancing under “Safe Start”**

Activity	Phase 4 In-Person	Phase 1-4 Remote
Briefings	X	X
Information Booths	X	
Open Houses and Workshops	X	X
RTP Interactive Website		X
Notification	X	X
Consultation	X	X
Meetings of Governing and Advisory Bodies	X	X
Public Comment Period	X	X

In past updates to the RTP, SCOG already utilized remote public engagement strategies such as notification and public comment periods; more remote or virtual public involvement strategies will likely be used during this plan update to engage stakeholders and the public in the planning process. The following sections include a selection of possible outreach activities and methods which may be used to share information and solicit input on the RTP update.

#### **4.1 Briefings**

Briefings to both member organizations of SCOG and non-member organizations allow SCOG staff to delve into the details of the RTP update with small groups. Briefing materials may include a presentation, fact sheet, and comment form, and will provide information about the RTP update process. Attendees will be able to provide feedback by talking to the project team, and/or by engaging with other outreach materials such as webpages, surveys and comment forms.

For maximum benefit, briefings should begin in the early stages of the RTP update to build awareness of the RTP update process and upcoming opportunities for the public to provide feedback. Briefings can continue throughout the RTP update process, with an

emphasis on when updated information is available and/or when feedback is sought to help inform key decision points in the process.

Organizations may be contacted during the planning process to see if they would be interested in receiving a briefing. Briefings may be available for in person meetings, as well as remote or virtual meetings.

#### *4.2 Information Booths*

Information booths at existing local public events provide the opportunity to reach the public in an informal setting that does not require attendees to change their schedule in order to receive information. Attendees will be able to provide feedback by talking to the project team, or by completing a comment form. Information booths provide easily accessible opportunities for project staff to meet one-on-one with those interested in the RTP update process and to answer questions and receive feedback.

Materials at information booths may include a display board(s), fact sheet, and comment form. Information presented focuses on what the RTP is, why it needs to be updated and the proposed updates. For optimal impact, information booths should be held when specific feedback is sought to inform the RTP update process, such as determining which transportation projects can be funded given the estimated available revenues out to 2045.

#### *4.3 Open Houses and Workshops*

Open houses and workshops may be conducted through in-person meetings, as well as through virtual means such as remote online meetings and telephone town halls. Such meetings could be utilized to facilitate discussion among stakeholders, SCOG staff and members of the public on general regional issues or specific technical topics related to the RTP update.

#### *4.4 RTP Interactive Website*

In lieu of, and in addition to, traditional involvement activities such as information booths at events, an interactive website or series of webpages specific to the RTP update could serve as an easily accessible, virtual information board. The RTP website could serve as a landing platform and clearinghouse for all public engagement activities and materials related to the Plan update, including notification through a calendar of events, e-mail mailing list subscriptions, links to online workshops and open houses, informational documents, online surveys and comment forms, staff contact information, and interactive maps. An RTP website should not serve as the only form of public engagement for the plan update, and should be supplemented by notification in print media and targeted involvement with groups lacking access to the internet.

#### *4.5 Notification*



Notification of upcoming outreach opportunities, or key milestones in the RTP update process will occur through a variety of methods, and could include: emails to key project contacts, information posted on SCOG's website and announcements in local newspapers.

#### *4.6 Consultation*

Federally recognized Indian tribes, Federal agencies, and State agencies will be consulted during the RTP update process. Consultation will involve a discussion of potential environmental mitigation in relation to the RTP and the broader development of the RTP. The views of these parties will be considered prior to taking any formal action updating the RTP. Key decision points for consultation will follow the approved schedule for the RTP update and ample time will be provided to conduct effective consultation.

The *Briefings* (4.1), *Information Booths* (4.2), *Open Houses and Workshops* (4.3), *RTP Interactive Website* (4.4), and *Notification* (4.5) activities may be utilized in the consultation process, as appropriate.

#### *4.7 Meetings of Governing and Advisory Bodies*

All meetings of the SCOG Transportation Policy Board and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) are open to the public. This level of public access ensures that the decision-making process is open and transparent. The TAC provides advice to the Transportation Policy Board, the governing body of the MPO and RTPO.

Additionally, opportunities for public comment will be provided at all Transportation Policy Board meetings, or according to remote meeting procedures. Comments can be provided by the public – verbally, in writing, or both – that are incorporated as part of the official meeting minutes of the Transportation Policy Board. In-person meetings may occur during the planning period, although it is unlikely that they would happen until Phase 4 of the “Safe Start” reopening plan.

#### *4.8 Public Comment Period*

After a draft of the updated RTP is completed, it will be released for public comment. The public comment period will be not less than 14 calendar days. Notice of the public comment period will be posted in newspapers of record in Skagit County – the Skagit Valley Herald – and on SCOG's website. Final action on the updated RTP will be preceded by a public comment period. An additional opportunity for public comment may be provided as well, if necessary.

### *5.0 Materials*

A variety of materials will be developed to assist with providing the public with information about the planning process and to solicit input that will inform the RTP update. Examples of traditional materials which may be produced are visual display boards, a project fact sheet, a PowerPoint presentation(s), a comment form and a memo

summarizing public involvement throughout the planning process. Virtual engagement materials may also be developed to support remote or socially distanced engagement strategies. Table 2 illustrates how virtual engagement materials can support or replace traditional materials.

**Table 2. Comparison of Traditional and Virtual Engagement Materials**

In-Person Material	Virtual or Remote Material
Visual Display Board	Informational Webpages
Project Fact Sheet	PDF Project Fact Sheet Project Fact Webpage
PowerPoint Presentation	PowerPoint Presentation
Comment Form	Online Comment Form
Surveys and Prioritization Activities	Online Surveys and Polls
Project Area and Regional Maps	Online Maps and StoryMaps
Informational Mailings and Advertisements	Emails and Online Advertisements
Public Involvement Summary Memo	Public Involvement Summary Memo

### 5.1 Visual Display Boards or Informational Webpages

Informational visual display boards or informational webpages may be produced for use at the public involvement activities outlined in Section 4. The boards or pages will utilize visualization techniques, as appropriate, and include the following:

- An introduction to the RTP;
- Information on the RTP update process;
- Information on the project selection process;
- Key project contact information.

*(See Appendix B for key project team members that will be working on the RTP update and their contact information)*

### 5.2 Project Fact Sheet

A fact sheet may be produced and distributed at public involvement events or may be available through the RTP and SCOG websites. The fact sheet will contain general

information about the RTP update including information on the purpose of, and need to update, the RTP; the process to update the RTP; and how priority projects are identified. The fact sheet will also include key contact information.

### *5.3 PowerPoint Presentation*

A presentation(s) may be produced for use at briefings, and is able to be shared at in-person or remote meetings. Presentation subjects to highlight could include:

- What is the RTP and why is it important?
- Why does the RTP need to be updated?
- What is the process and schedule for updating the RTP?
- What is included in the updated RTP?
- How are transportation projects selected?
- How does funding affect the RTP update process?
- How can the public get involved?

### *5.4 Comment Form*

A public comment form may be developed to easily receive feedback from the public and ensure that opportunities to submit written comments will be available prior to the public comment period(s). Paper, as well as electronic or online comment submission forms, could be developed in order to ensure accessibility despite social distancing measures. The comment form can be used at information booths, briefings and consultations could be included on the SCOG or RTP website, and will allow for general feedback to be considered during the planning process.

### *5.5 Surveys and Prioritization Activities*

During the 2015–2016 RTP update, interactive prioritization boards were utilized at public events as a way to engage and solicit targeted feedback. Surveys, polls, and similar prioritization activities may be utilized during the current plan update and can be made available in a traditional paper format for events, or in a virtual format available on the SCOG or RTP website.

### *5.6 Project Area and Regional Maps*

Area maps can be produced as a visualization technique for conveying information to the public, as well as soliciting feedback on specific projects, geographic areas, and

regional issues. These maps may also be made available in an electronic format through interactive online maps.

### *5.7 Informational Mailings and Advertisements*

Advertisements as well as informational mailings may serve as form of notification, inviting the public to engage with the RTP planning process. Such mailings and advertisements can draw a larger audience to the planning process regardless of social distancing or remote work measures. Advertisements can be placed in print media as well as through online channels such as online newspapers, blogs and social media networks.

### *5.8 Public Involvement Summary Memo*

The public involvement summary memo will provide an overview of all public involvement activities conducted throughout the course of the RTP update process. The summary memo will note issues identified through the public outreach process, discuss the key themes of public feedback received, and note how public input was considered in the updated RTP.

In addition to the items listed above, additional informational materials may be developed, as appropriate.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE<sup>1</sup> FOR 2020–2021 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

Tasks	2020												2021		
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.
Scope of work	Discuss		Approve												
Public involvement					Discuss	Approve									
Data and modeling															
Regional transportation system								Discuss							
Priorities, policies and goals								Discuss							
Call for projects								Discuss							
Financial plan												Discuss			
Project prioritization												Discuss			
Performance management												Discuss			
Environmental constraints												Discuss			
Draft plan													Release		
Public comment period															
Final plan															Adopt
Submit plan															

<sup>1</sup> Tasks and expected dates subject to revision.

## APPENDIX B: KEY PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

Name	Organization	Role	Contact Information
Mark Hamilton	SCOG	Staff	(360) 416-7876 <a href="mailto:markh@scog.net">markh@scog.net</a>
Kevin Murphy	SCOG	Staff	(360) 416-7871 <a href="mailto:kevinm@scog.net">kevinm@scog.net</a>
Katie Bunge	SCOG	Staff	(360) 416-6678 <a href="mailto:kbunge@scog.net">kbunge@scog.net</a>